

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

Govert Westerveld







# **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**



**Govert Westerveld  
2013**



# **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**



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# **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this work to the eminent Dutch checker historian, Gerard Bakker**



# **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

## **INDEX:**

<b>Biography of William Shelley Branch</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>Foreword in my draughts-history book of 1997, revised by Ken Whyld</b>	<b>XI</b>
<b>The confusing history of draughts (checkers)</b>	<b>XXI</b>
<b>The History of Draughts of William Shelley Branch,</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>135</b>

**The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

**WILLIAM SHELLEY  
BRANCH,  
  
AND HIS SPANISH  
ORIGIN OF THE GAME**



# **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

## **Biography of William Shelley Branch.**

William Shelley Branch was born in Hastings<sup>1</sup>, Sussex on 4th July 1854. He was the son of William Branch and Elizabeth Shelley (born c 1826, Lewes). Elizabeth Shelley had married William Branch in Lewes in 1853 [marriage registered in Lewes during the third quarter of 1853]. The newly-weds moved to Hastings, where Mrs Elizabeth Branch started a dressmaking business.



**William Shelley Branch**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/LewesPhotgrsAB.htm>

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

William Shelley Branch was born in Hastings the following year. William's brother Henry Edward Branch arrived some six years later [the birth of Henry Edward Branch was registered in Hastings during the third quarter of 1860]. When William Branch senior died, Mrs Elizabeth Branch returned with her two young boys to her home town of Lewes, where she set up a haberdasher's shop in the High Street (Mrs Elizabeth Branch is listed as a haberdasher in Lewes High Street in an 1866 trade directory).

Some time before 1878, when he was in his early twenties, William Shelley Branch established a photographic studio which spanned No. 47 and 48 High Street, Lewes. Around 1879, William S. Branch sold this studio to Daubigny Hatch (Henry D'aubigny Hatch) and set up a photographic studio at his mother's fancy goods store at 16 High Street, Lewes.

At the time of the 1881 census, Mrs Elizabeth Branch and her sons were living at 16 High Street, Lewes (also known as 16 School Hill), the location of the fancy goods shop and studio. Elizabeth Branch is described in the census return as a 55 year old widow, working as a dealer in wool, toys and other "fancy goods". Henry E. Branch, aged 20, gives his occupation as "News Reporter", while his older brother William S. Branch is entered on the census return as a "Photographer", aged 26.

Around 1888, Mrs Elizabeth Branch and her two sons moved to Cheltenham in Gloucestershire. William Shelley Branch was then aged about thirty-four and his brother Henry was in his late twenties. William Shelley Branch established a photographic studio in Suffolk Road, Cheltenham, where he continued in business as a professional photographer for the next five years. Henry Branch, William's younger brother, worked as a journalist for the local newspaper.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



The reverse of a carte-de-visite portrait<sup>2</sup> by W. S. Branch of 16 School Hill, Lewes, giving the studio's location as "Near the Fitzroy Library" and advertising "groups taken by the Instantaneous Process".(c1885).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/LewesPhotgrsAB.htm>

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

From around 1895, William S. Branch appears to have abandoned photography for journalism. When the 1901 census was taken, forty-six year old William S. Branch gave his occupation as "Journalist". His brother, Henry E. Branch, is described on the 1901 census return as a "Journalist, SR Editor & Reporter". Henry Branch is remembered today as the author of a study of Gloucestershire entitled "*Cotswold and Vale: or Glimpses of Past and Present in Gloucestershire*", which was published in Cheltenham in 1904. A keen chess player, William Shelley Branch is known today mainly as a chess historian and the author of an historical survey of the game entitled "*A Sketch History of Chess*", published in the *British Chess Magazine* in 1911. Between 1901 and 1932, William Shelley Branch wrote regular articles on the game of chess for the *Cheltenham Chronicle* and the *Cheltenham Examiner*. Recognised as an authority on the game, William S. Branch wrote articles on chess and other board games for newspapers at home and abroad. Between 1911 and 1912, William S. Branch wrote a series of articles for the American newspaper *The Pittsburg Leader* under the general heading of "*The history of checkers from the earliest known date. Its evolution and growth*".

William Shelley Branch died in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire on 22nd January 1933, at the age of 78.

**The Pittsburg Leader, on November 12, 1911 gave more details on the draughts activities of William Shelley Branch:**

Learning the rudiments of both checkers and chess at an early age, he became well versed in each before he was 30, at which age he found himself the secretary of a small chess club, where checkers was also played, at Brighton. Removing to Lewes, a neighbouring small town, but the capital of the county of Sussex, he became the secretary, and, for a time, the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

leading player of its chess club. In 1889 he removed to Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, and finding that town of nearly 50,000 inhabitants without a chess club, he promptly started one, with the aid of the member of parliament for the borough, and others, to the number of 89 altogether: a curious coincidence. He became the secretary and match captain-for 15 years-but the leading player only in the first and the sixth. From an early period checkers was also played by some of the members, and some years later one of them gave a silver cup to be competed for annually at checkers. Mr. Branch never got them, though he won the chess championship cup twice, and tied for it another time. He joined the Cheltenham draughts club for some years, and was the draughts editor of a local English paper for some time. He had previously, and is still, the chess editor of another journal: the Cheltenham Examiner. In this he occasionally devotes some space to draughts, more especially on the literary and historical side of the game, and in its defence as a scientific game, not so well thought of by many chess players as it should be. Being from an early age a student of old English literature, Mr. Branch became interested in what he found about the games played centuries ago, and began to study the works of the authorities on three subjects. He wrote a series of articles on the history of chess for the British Chess Magazine in 1899-1900, and later on sent a few notes on ancient draughts to the Draughts World, and several journals. This brought him in connection with Mr. H.J.R. Murray, of Cambridge, also a student of chess and draughts history, and now the chief living authority on the former. With a remarkable knowledge of languages, and of all ancient manuscripts dealing with chess and draughts, Mr. Murray has been able to increase Mr. Branch's knowledge considerably. Mr. Murray is not connected with any journal, but is a government inspector of education. He occasionally writes historical articles for the British Chess Magazine.



**The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

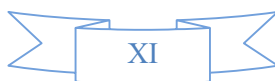
**FOREWORD**

**IN MY**

**DRAUGHTS-HISTORY**

**BOOK OF 1997**

**Revised by  
KEN WHYLD**



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

### **THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUEEN ISABEL LA CATOLICA ON THE NEW POWERFUL DAMA IN THE ORIGIN OF THE DRAUGHTS AND MODERN CHESS GAME.**

Until now the different scholars practically limited themselves to indicating France as the country of origin of the draughts game, among them the famous chess scholar Harold James Ruthven Murray<sup>1</sup> is emphasized. With respect to the new powerful dama in the modern chess game that was developed around the end of the XV century, the situation is not much better, since the scholars of this game believe that France, as well as Italy, could be the native countries of this modality of the game, in spite of the fact that the first chess book, Luis Ramirez of Lucena, with such new modality dates from 1497 and is of Spanish origin<sup>2</sup>.

In draughts we see a similar situation, since the first Spanish books about the game<sup>3</sup> of draughts have a very high level and date from the XVI century, while the first French book<sup>4</sup> comes from the XVII century and the game described is a very elemental one. Contrary to this evidence, the scholars did not consider it necessary to grant Spain the honour of being the creative country of the game of draughts and of the new modality in the chess game with the new dama. How is it possible that the different scholars never took into account the rich Spanish bibliography on both games? Was it a linguistic problem or were there other existing circumstances that forbade this reasoning? In the case of draughts, this could be a reasonable cause for the Dutch scholars that did not master the Spanish language, but not for the English scholar Murray who knew several languages, among them Arabic. On the other hand, regarding the chess game it is difficult to accept that none of them knew the Spanish language. Therefore there had to be other motives for them to

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

deny that Spain could be the country of origin of the new powerful dama in chess. Whatever it may be, there can be several motives, but happily in the last years we have observed a trend of two outstanding scholars that began to modify this point of view.

In the case of the new powerful dama in the chess game in Spain we rely on an outstanding chess investigator, Dr. Ricardo Calvo, who, since the eighties defends Spain as being the country of origin of the new powerful dama in the game of chess<sup>5</sup>. His investigations and discoveries of ancient written chess manuscripts from the XV century make it possible to assert that this new property is of Spanish origin<sup>6</sup>.

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1. MURRAY, HAROLD JAMES RUTHVEN. (1952) A history of Board-games other than chess, Oxford, p. 75.

2. LUCENA, LUIS RAMIREZ DE (1497). Repetición de amores e arte de Axedres con CL Juegos de Partido. Salamanca.

3. TORQUEMADA, ANTONIO DE (1547). El ingenio, ò juego de Marro, de punta, ò Damas. Valencia.

4. MALLET, PIERRE (1668). Le jeu des dames - *Avec toutes les maximes et règles, tant générales que particulières, qu'il faut observer an icelui. Et la méthode d'y bien jouer*". - Paris.

5. CALVO, RICARDO (1985a). Un nuevo manuscrito de ajedrez del siglo XV. Revista Jaque. San Sebastián Año XV. Núm. 173. 15 de abril, pp 252-253.

CALVO, RICARDO (1985b). Ein neues Schachmanuskript aus dem 15. Jahrhundert. Europa Rochade. Maintal. N.3, p. 28.

CALVO, RICARDO (1985c). Un nouveau manuscrit échiquéen du XV siècle. Europe Échecs. Besançon. N. 319-320. juillet - Août, pp 434-435.

6. CALVO, RICARDO (1991). Birthplace of modern chess. New in Chess, Alkmaar (Holanda). Núm. 7:82-89.

CALVO, RICARDO (1992). Valencia, Geburtsstätte des modernen Schachs. Schach-Journal. Berlin. Núm. 3:34-46.

CALVO, RICARDO & MEISSENBURG, EGBERT (1995). Valencia und die Geburt des neuen Schachs. Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, Wien, pp 77-89.

With respect to the draughts game we must not forget to mention Ir. Gerard Bakker of Utrecht (Holland), who with an initial work in 1983 and another advanced one in 1987



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

praises the Spanish<sup>7</sup> origin of draughts from the alquerque and chess game. Those were good starting points, but still there were remaining dark points in the solidity of this hypothesis. This is, humbly speaking, the purpose of this book, to seek evidence and to situate Spain in an outstanding place that it naturally deserves. For such effect we chronologically treat the texts studied between 1283 and 1700, gathering more than 950 bibliographical references that can be more easily consulted by future scholars.

From 1986 we maintain the hypothesis that the origin of the game of draughts is a Spanish one and to such effect we have sought answers and evidence for some 10 years. We started on the basis of the fact that the chess game reflects the royal situation of a time. So we can ask ourselves why the queen in the modern chess game has more power than the king. If we study the life of Spanish royalty in the XV century we see that this question is not so difficult to answer. There was, in 1469 a dama in Castille that was married to a future king of Aragon, Fernando. Some years later, in 1475, this dama, Isabel la Católica, was crowned queen with greater effective power than her husband, Fernando. So much, so that when Spain in 1492 was released from the last Moorish outpost in Granada, discovering America and enforcing one sole religion in its territory, it was suddenly justified to use in chess a new queen with more power than her "king". But, concerning the name "dama", what is its origin? We know that the word "domina" was already translated in the XIV century by the French word "dame" in chess manuscripts and it is supposed that in the XV century, due to the influence of the printed books of Jacobus of Cessolis, one began to use frequently in Spain the dama term for the queen in chess. But was it not also due to the idealization of the woman to dama in court poetry, where the supremacy of the dama is one of the characteristics of the frustrated love?

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The new modality of the game in chess was given several names abroad. Thus, we see contemptuous terms as: "alla rabiosa" in the Italian translation and of "dame enragée" in the French translation. In Spain we see a neutral term: "Axedrez de la dama". Motive by which we also believe that France as well as Italy cannot be the country of origin of this new type of chess. Other historians asked themselves how it was possible that this peculiarity of the game could be introduced and maintained in all the European countries. This is not so difficult to explain if we take into account the fact that in 1492 Spain banished some 250.000 Jews from its land, who were distributed all over Europe with all its political and economic influence. Furthermore, the Spanish king Carlos V spent more time away from Spain than within its boundaries in function of the defence of the Spanish hegemony in Europe.

The new "powerful" dama of the chess game would have much to do with the invention of draughts and with the use of this new piece. To such effect we have chronologically treated in this work the bibliographical texts, whose commentaries are mostly translated into Dutch. The original texts are basically Spanish, though we have not forgotten to mention the most notable foreign books in Latin, German, English, French, Italian and Dutch.

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<sup>7</sup>. BAKKER, IR. GERARD (1983). *Damtijdschrift Het Nieuwe Damspel*, Utrecht, p. 44.

BAKKER, IR. GERARD (1987). *Damtijdschrift Het Nieuwe Damspel*, Utrecht, p. 42-46.

The first chapter deals with ancient Egyptian games, since they were considered erroneously by some scholars<sup>8</sup> as precursors of the dama. In the same chapter reference is made to the "Ludus Latrunculorum" game, that was taken by Thomas Hyde<sup>9</sup> as antecedent of the draughts-game. Below

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

are described similar games to the now disappeared "Ludus Latrunculorum", some of those which still exist. Chapter two describes a board game with squares (alternatively white and yellow?) the "Jaldeta", that was forbidden in the XIII century and was no longer practised around the end of the XV century. In chapter three we see ourselves in the Spain of the XV century, being able to observe the general influence of the Queen "Isabel la Católica". We discuss the expulsion of the Jews and the conversion of the Moors to the catholic religion. It was between 1474 and 1492 when the new powerful dama was developed and this time it can be considered as a dormant stage. The definitive beginning originated in 1492 when the queen was at the height of her reign : 1. Conquest of the Morish outpost "Granada"; 2. Discovery of America; 3. Expulsion of the Jews; 4. Loss of power of the nobility due to the administrative reforms.

In chapter 4 the Latin terms "scruporum" and "calculorum" are examined. In the subsequent chapters (5, 6, 7, 8,) Spanish words, which previously were designated to the draughts-game, such as "marro", "marro de punta", "andarraya" and "alquerque" are studied in detail. We demonstrate with bibliographical proofs that "punta" does not mean field, as Branch<sup>10</sup>, Murray<sup>11</sup>, Kruijswijk<sup>12</sup> and Van der Stoep<sup>13</sup> claim, rather "punta" means diagonal. Thus the game "marro de punta" is nothing more than a game with a diagonal direction. The denominations "marro" and "marro de punta" belong to the kingdom of Aragon and those of "andarraya" and "alquerque" to the kingdom of Castille.

The ancient word "trecha", that years afterwards was converted into "treta", is analyzed in chapter 9. Apparently the word "castro" (castles game) had a certain link to draughts in Turkey and Palestinian. In chapter 10 this expression is studied in detail. In chapter 11 we extensively analyze the Latin term "domina" and the word "dama". In the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

conclusion of this chapter different modalities of draughts in different countries are described. Also, in the following chapter the lost book of Antonio de Torquemada is examined. In 13 a vast study on the book of Juan de Timoneda, printed in 1635, is discussed. According to our investigations some of those texts could date from 1550. It is quite possible that some of the positions of draughts that appear in this book will be similar to those which are described in the book of Torquemada.

The Spanish draughts books between 1547 and 1996 and the first European draughts books are discussed in chapter 14, as well as the Spanish game books of the period of 1283-1700. At the beginning of the XIX century, Jose Paluzie y Lucena established the first Spanish bibliographical study of chess<sup>14</sup>.

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8. WILKINSON, JOHN GARDNER (1878). The manners and customs of the ancient Egyptians. Editie van Samuel Birch, London.

9. HYDE, THOMAS (1694). De Ludis Orientalibus, Oxford. Deel II.

10. BRANCH, WILLIAM SHELLEY (1911). The history of checkers from the earliest known date. Its evolution and growth, Cheltenham, England. Written for Pittsburg Leader between October 8, 1911 - April 14, 1912.

11. MURRAY, HAROLD JAMES RUTHVEN (1913). A history of chess, Oxford, p. 399.

MURRAY, HAROLD JAMES RUTHVEN. (1952) A history of Board-games other than chess, Oxford, p. 75.

12. KRUIJSWIJK, KAREL WENDEL (1966). Algemene historie en bibliografie van het damspel, Den Haag, p. 53.

13. STOEP, ARIE VAN DER (1984). A history of draughts, Rockanje, p. 81.

14. PALUZIE Y LUCENA, JOSÉ (1912). Primer ensayo de bibliografía Española de ajedrez, Barcelona 1912, pp. 8-11.

In this modest text we do something similar with draughts. To the existing bibliographical lists in other history books about draughts we can add a draughts book of 1792<sup>15</sup> found by Prof. Dr. Juan Torres Fontes<sup>16</sup> and a manuscript of the year 1690 we found in an Andalusian library<sup>17</sup>. Until now a complete relationship among all the Spanish books, referred to the games in the period 1283-1700, had not been

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

established. Thus our investigations could fill that vacuum. In chapter 15 hypothesis of other draughts scholars are submitted to discussion and furthermore a point of view is offered on the development of the game of alquerque of 12 up to our current draughts. Much evidence exists to assert that Valencia could be the kingdom of origin of draughts, similar to the powerful dama in the chess game, according to the opinion of the chess scholar Dr. Ricardo Calvo. Finally, the Spanish bibliophile of Spanish draughts books, Victor Cantalapiedra Martin, expounds in Spanish language, his knowledge of the said books in chapter 16.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This book owes its existence to the draughts scholar Rob Jansen of Amsterdam and to his efforts over the periods 1991-1994 and 1996-1997 in providing me with abundant bibliographical material. During my years of investigation I have had the fortune of finding scholars of great prestige: my friend Dr. Ricardo Calvo, a great chess scholar, who provided me with data on his investigations of the origin of modern chess. Without his support and stimulus this book would never have been concluded; Prof. Dr. Juan Torres Fontes (Professor of the University of Murcia in Medieval History) who was so kind as to give me several of his books written on Queen Isabel la Católica and on the XV century, while giving me valuable suggestions on how to continue the investigation; the Dutch draughts scholar, Ir. Gerard Bakker, who kindly made available to me all his publications and photographic material in his draughts magazines; Prof. Dr. Günther G. Bauer of the Institute for the Investigation and the Pedagogy of the Game, created in 1991 by himself, as the

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

fifth scientific institute of the Music and fine arts school, Mozarteum, at Salzburg in Austria, for his support in publishing my previous articles in his books<sup>18</sup> and in encouraging me to continue publishing; the Spanish draughtsbook bibliophile, Victor Cantalapiedra Martín, who taught me to play the Spanish draughtsgame and informed me little by little the secrets of his extensive library, and made available to me a great quantity of bibliographical material and photos. More people have collaborated in the preparation of this book and it is not possible to mention all of them. Nevertheless, we do not want to forget Prof. Dr. Joachim Petzold (Germany), Mr. Felix Berkovich (U.S.A), the Dutch draughts scholars Karel Wendel Kruijswijk and Drs. Arie van der Stoep, Dr. Pratesi (Italy), Dr. Adriano Chicco (Italy), the Portugese draughts scholars Dr. Cândido Sena Carneiro and Francisco Henriques, and Flory Navarro Belmonte (Licensed in Medieval History by the University of Murcia). Thanks to all of them!

**Revision: Ken Whyld (United Kingdom).**



## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

In my correspondence maintained with Ken Whyld before his death, it became very clear that he believed in the creation of draughts being developed in Spain.



**Ken Whyld and Yuri Averbakh**  
**"Tassilo von Heydebrand und der Lasa and his Chess**  
**Collection"**  
**International Conference of Chess Historians**  
**Kórník, Sept. 16-18, 2002**  
**(Photo: Tomasz Lissowski)**

**THE CONFUSING  
HISTORY OF  
DRAUGHTS  
(CHECKERS)**

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

## The confusing history of draughts (checkers).

**"Hansel and Gretel"** ("Little John and Little Margaret") is a well-known fairy tale of German origin, recorded by the Brothers Grimm and published in 1812. Everybody knows this story. Now I will draw your attention on some fairy tales about the alquerque-12 and the draughts (checkers) game. So in the internet we see, for example, the following statement:

The game of Checkers, or a game very similar to it, has been played for thousands of years. Known throughout history as "alquerque" (in ancient Egypt), "fierges" or "ferses" in France, "jeu de dames," "dames" (also in France, though later on), "draughts" in England, "plaisant" in Holland (or possibly France), and finally "checkers" after it reached North America, checkers is a simple game played with flat discs on a board covered in alternating light and dark squares

Another website is saying the following:

### History of Checkers

Checkers has quite a long history with international appeal. A board that was similar to a Checkers board was found during an archeological dig in the Middle East. Surprisingly, the board carbon dated back to 3000 B.C.. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether the rules were similar to modern day checkers, even though the numbers of pieces were different than today's game.

Next in **Checkers history**, we jump forward in time to 1400 B.C. At that time, Alquerque or Quirkat was being played throughout Egypt. Depictions of the game were even carved into the walls of sacred temples. The size of the board was different (it was 5x5), and the pieces moved along intersections of lines instead of diagonally from square to square; but, the game was otherwise thought to be similar to modern day Checkers. The pieces of Alquerque were flat and circular and were even separated into light and dark colors. In addition, the goal was similar: capture the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

pieces of the other player. Alquerque was even discussed by the greatest minds of the time, Plato and Homer.

Moving forward on the timeline, we come to the 12th century A.D. and the birth of modern day Checkers. It is thought that a Frenchman converted the rules and game pieces of ancient Alquerque to an 8x8 chessboard and played with a dozen pieces on each side. And.... Checkers was born. The French named this game, Fierges, and called the pieces, ferses.

By the 15th century A.D., the name of the game had changed but the rules remained pretty much the same. Those playing at that time called it Jeu de Dames, or Dames. When the French decided that the player must jump the opponent's pieces, if possible, they changed the name again. This time to Jeu Force.

Jeu Force then traveled across the Channel to England. There it received yet another name, Draughts. In the 18th century, the board was changed again to a 10x10 structure with twenty pieces on each side and was called Plaisant. This structure probably arose from players in Holland. Only when the game crossed the Atlantic to North America did it gain the name we all know...Checkers.

Who is the person who is responsible partly for these nice stories? This is nobody else than the famous boardgame specialist Harold James Ruthven Murray (1868 – 1955). In 1913, he published his most significant work, “A History of Chess”, proposing the theory that chess originated in India. Justin du Coeur gives us an exceptionally good idea who was Murray in the past:

Many books with this title have been written down the years, but this is the one that really counts; while the scholarship has advanced a little since Murray's day, it's still the case that everyone starts here and then moves forward. If you have only one book on period chess, this is the one to have. It's an enormous time (900 pages), and the vast majority of it is devoted to the pre-1600 history of the game. Once the game stabilizes in the early modern

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

period, Murray seems to mostly lose interest. Murray goes into minute detail about every aspect of the game, discussing not only the rules, but also issues like the literature written in period using chess as a metaphor, three chapters on period chess problems, and of course descriptions of every known early variant of chess (of which there were many). The scholarship is impeccable; not only does the book discuss pretty much every known source in detail, it includes great swathes of medieval texts on the subject, in Latin, Spanish, English and other languages. This is *not* a book for the casual reader; it is enormous and dense. But for anyone seriously interested in the subject of period chess, it is the most vital book on the subject<sup>3</sup>.

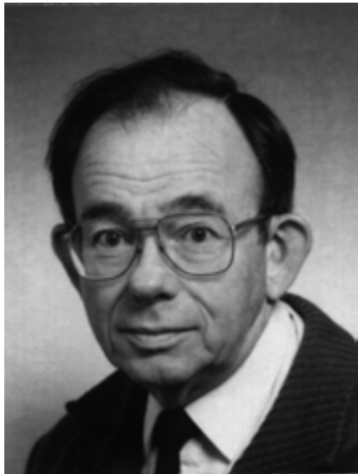
In 1952, Murray published “A History of Board Games other than Chess”, proposing the theory that alquerque-12 originated in Egypt and the draughts game in France. Since his famous book about the History of Chess of 1913, everybody believed what the esteemed board specialist Murray was saying. This, because he was and continue being one of the greatest board game specialists. Many historians believe that Murray is impeccable, but this idea will only paralyze future work of others.

Murray dominated English, German, Latin, Norman-French, and it was marvellous to see that he on a later age also learned Arabic in order to discuss the Arabic chess manuscripts. However, he did not know the Spanish language like many others and so he was not aware of the famous chess and draughts history of Spain. He knew a lot of the history of draughts from William Shelley Branch (1854 – 1933) without mentioning him. The true is that Murray copied in more than one occasion historical pages from other historians without mentioning them. A exceedingly funny matter, because sooner or later everybody will know that.

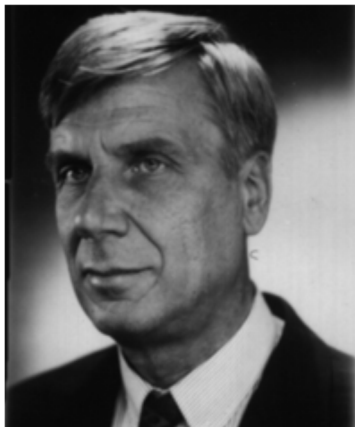
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<sup>3</sup> Justin du Coeur.

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**



**Ir. Gerard Bakker**



**Rob Jansen**



# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

## The draughts historian Dr. Arie van der Stoep turned the World on its Head in 2006.

Taking into account that on the backgammon board of King Alfonso X of Castile fifteen games could be played, it is also reasonable to conclude that on the board to be used for alquerque-12 different games could have been played that had nothing to do with the alquerque-12 game.

## The arguments of Dr. Arie van der Stoep.

This draughts' historian turned the World on Its Head in 2006 when he confirmed<sup>4</sup> that *Draughts* already existed more than 4000 years B.C.

In this sense, we have to understand that Dr. Van der Stoep considers that the alquerque-12 game is the same as the Draughts game, something that I do not understand. On the other hand, Van der Stoep introduced a rule that board game historians never applied before linguistics. The use of linguistic methods did not only lead to many different views on the history of checkers or draughts, but according to Van der Stoep also cast doubts on the common view on the board games alquerque and chess. Van der Stoep describes the history of draughts as follows:

A primitive board game with the leap capture existed already forty centuries ago. People in Africa moved stones or shells on lines drawn in the sand. Just like we do, they took a piece by leaping over it. This game was not yet draught, for the pieces moved in any direction and the game did not include promotion.

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<sup>4</sup> **STOEP, Arie van der** (2006). Vierduizend jaar dammen. In: Het Damspel, number 5, pp. 16-17.  
<http://www.draughtshistory.nl/origin22.htm>

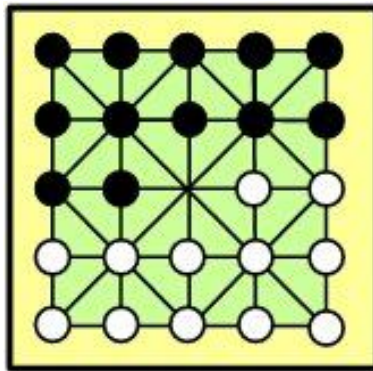
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

Although this historian does not come with proofs he stated furthermore:

Draughts was born between 2000 and 1500 BC, when an African devised the promotion. From this moment on moving and taking backwards was only permitted with a piece which had penetrated into the opponent's base row. The new game was played on a latticed board with 25 points, the two players each started with 12 pieces.

Thereafter the historians showed an Alquerque-12 board and states that:

the board was incised into the roofing slabs of the temple of Luxor, built on the western side of the Nile about 1500 BC<sup>5</sup>.



**Alquerque-12 board**

I never have believed in Murray that *Draught* was played in Egypt. The only known games that probably were played in

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<sup>5</sup> **GRUNFELD, Frederic V.** (1982). Games of the world: how to make them, how to play them, how they came to be, p. 38. Everybody is copying everybody else.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

this country were *Senet*, *Han* and *Tau*. Also, I did not believe in the matter that Greeks had played *Draughts*<sup>6</sup>. The game *Diagrammismos* (*Grammai*) was the Roman game *Duodecim Scripta* and the Greek game *Petteia* was the Roman game *Ludus Latrunculorum*. However, Van der Stoep had another opinion:

Just like in our days a civilisation produced goods other people needed. So traders travelled to other parts of the world, with their board games. According to the philosopher Plato the Greek borrowed their board games from Egypt. Among these games was draughts. It is unknown in which age draughts reached Athens, but the Greek played the game in the 5th c. BC, under the name *Five lines game*. The name is obvious: count the lines of the board above. Draughts was so common and so popular, that the game passed into proverbs. If someone had to abandon a favourable position, the Greek said: "He must give up the holy line". This holy line was the horizontal centre line of the draughts board. Obviously a singleton on this line could not be taken, may be only by a king of by an attack of two enemy singletons simultaneously.

As to the Roman games, I had the same opinion with regards to the Egyptian and Greek games. *Draught* was not played in the Roman times. The only known Roman board games were four: *Alea*, *Ludus duodecim scripta*, *Ludus Latrunculorum* and a game that described the poet Ovidius, without saying its name, but that obviously was referring to the *alquerque-3* (*three on a row*). Taking into account other games such as *Erêser* or *Tampullen* (*alquerque-12*) played by the Batak population, I believed in a development from *Ludus Latrunculorum* to *alquerque-12* board. Since I could not date the *Erêser* or *Tampullen*, I consequently, could not prove that

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<sup>6</sup> WESTERVELD, Govert (2004). La reina Isabel la Católica, su reflejo en la dama poderosa de Valencia, cuna de ajedrez moderno y origen del juego de damas. En colaboración con José Antonio Garzón Roger, Valencia. Generalidad Valenciana, Secretaria Autonómica de Cultura. PP 1-2.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

the alquerque-12 was played in Roman times<sup>7</sup>. However, Van der Stoep saw things differently and considered that Roman people also played Draughts, and he referred to the classic draughts board, in this case again to the Alquerque-12 board. Moreover, he thought that the alquerque-12 game in the Roman Empire had a short King<sup>8</sup>. However, I, myself do not find the alquerque-12 game as a Draughts game, neither do I believe in a short King in Roman times. More about that in the forthcoming pages, but let us now follow Van der Stoep who stated:

The ancient Greek and ancient Romans are always bracketed together. Ancient Rome, did it play draughts? Yes. The Roman name for the game was *Twelve pieces*, again an understandable name, see the classic draughts board above. The first draughts player whose name we know is Publius Mucius Scaevola, living in the 2nd c. BC. He was said to be able to play blindfold. As one of the fathers of the Roman civil code, which influenced the modern western legislation, and as a member of the Collegium Pontificum, a sacred college with both a political and a religious authority, he was one of Rome's most reputable citizens.

### **Draughts was a game for the elite, too in Roman times.**

Scaevola shows that in Rome by the elite, or even by the elite Draught was played. Contrary to popular belief in our time, the game remained popular among the higher classes until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then it was eclipsed by chess, a game that borrowed twice elements from the chess game. But in Scaevola's time chess still did not exist.

So according to Van der Stoep, Roman citizens played draughts between the 1st and 5th century A.D. What now is

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<sup>7</sup> WESTERVELD, Govert (2004). La reina Isabel la Católica, su reflejo en la dama poderosa de Valencia, cuna de ajedrez moderno y origen del juego de damas. En colaboración con José Antonio Garzón Roger, Valencia. Generalidad Valenciana, Secretaria Autonómica de Cultura. PP 2-12.

<sup>8</sup> DOEVES, Bram (2008). Magazine Het Damspel, number 1, p. 8.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

following is a summary of Dutch and English text<sup>9</sup>. We see that Van der Stoep considers alquerque-12 being Draughts and that the alquerque-12 board such as figuring in the Manuscript of King Alfonso X of Castile, is still the same as the Egyptian Draughts' board.

### **Draughts obtained a new name.**

The incorporation of Roman laws is only one example of Roman influence on Europe. Three countries in particular assimilated Rome's culture: France, Italy and Spain, Romance, i.e. Latin speaking countries. One of the treasures they received was draughts. Between the 1st and the 6th c. A.D. earlier the Latin name of the game was changed into *Game with pieces*. There was a second board game with this name: morris, which proves draughts and morris were often played together.

### **A new long king: before the 8th c. AD**

This Latin name "game with pieces" was borrowed by Arab tribes. Only the name, *alquerque*, for they must have been familiar with both draughts and morris". Before the 8th c. AD, an Arab draughts player thought up a new promotion rule: the king acquired a greater freedom of move. The *long king* was born. In the 8th c. AD the Moors, Arab people, conquered Spain. Their draughts, more lively and speedy than the Roman game with the short king –as computer simulations prove- conquered the territory too. In the 13th c., Alfonso X, king of Castile and Leon, ordered a description of the board games played in his environment. At his court, chess and tables were the most fashionable games, both profusely explained and illustrated. Draughts was disposed of in a short, sloppy sketch of the rules. Fortunately, the responsible clerk added a drawing of the current board with the opening position: still the Egyptian draughts board.

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<sup>9</sup> **STOEP, Arie van der** (2006). Vierduizend jaar dammen. In: Het Damspel, number 5, pp. 16-17.

**STOEP, Arie van der** (2006?). Four thousands years draughts (checkers). In: <http://alemanni.pagesperso-orange.fr/history.html>



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



Playing Arab draughts in Spain, 13th c., with a long king<sup>10</sup>

**The [very popular] Draughts game transferred to the chess board: 14th c.**

In France between 1000 and 1500, may be earlier, draughts was very popular given the dozens of expressions based on the game. This popularity might be responsible for an innovation, made in the 14th c.: a French draughts player started to play draughts on the chess board. This innovation met with approval, so much that draughts on the chequered board was given an own name: French *jeu de dames*, meaning “game of the dams (dikes)”. Draughts players from other countries on the continent adopted this custom together with its name, but English players preferred the name *Checkers*, literally “game on the chequered board”.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.draughtshistory.nl/Chapter08.htm>  
I cannot agree to this theory of Dr. Van der Stoep.

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

## Introduction of the huff: 15th Century.

In the 15th c. a new innovation, probably again made in France, changed the character of draughts: capturing became obliged on the penalty of the huff. And odd practice, this huff: a player overlooks a capture and his opponent takes the piece in question off the board, brings it to his lips and blows. The game with the huff received its own name, in French *forcé*, in English *draughts*, literally “moving a piece”. Spanish draughts players adopted this rule, but they extended it with the multiple capture: multiple take precedes single take. As we have seen, the Spanish game is Arabic, the variety with the long king. This long king incited Spanish chess players to replace their “short” medieval queen with a “long” queen, the piece with the move of our days. The name of this new queen reminds of its origin: *dama*, taken from the Spanish word *damas*, ‘draughts’. At the 13th c. court of King Alfonso draughts may have been a minor game, but two centuries later it undoubtedly was far from minor, because it could influence on chess.

## Discrepancies by other historians.

Van der Stoep is not giving written proofs of the fact that the alquerque-12 game was played with a long King in Spain between the 8th and 14th century. Neither is Van der Stoep proving with documents the fact that the alquerque-12 game was extremely popular in France between 1000 – 1500, nor is Van der Stoep proving that the alquerque-12 game was transferred in France in the 14th century to the chess board. However, if we take into account the theory of Dr. Pratesi, an assumption that need of course more proofs<sup>11</sup>, then the draughts game was played before all among members of the leading social class. If this is true, then such members would have made books or manuscripts about the game. Strange

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<sup>11</sup> PRATESI, Dr. Franco (1998). Dammen voor de hogere standen. In: Dutch Draughts Magazine “De Problemist”, Number 1, Februar, pp. 16-17.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

enough this is not the case in France, but only the case in Spain and not in other countries in the 16th and 17th century. Dr. Pratesi is aware that he needs to provide proofs, but he already gave an example with the book written by Giorgio Roberti<sup>12</sup>. Roberti, a recognized authority on whose research we can rely makes clear that draughts for a long time were played almost exclusively by representatives from the middle and upper classes. Only in the thirties of the 20th century it became a popular game. Here, I offer a overview of the thesis of Dr. Pratesi:

And what can be told about the draughts game?

I am silent on the question of the origin or the French original name that could mean in an early stage “game played by women of the aristocratic class”. For me the social distribution is important. According to the common view the game remained mainly restricted to the lower classes, but that view is surely a thing to nuance. Just as other games that require a high skill, one cannot play the game on high level without much experience. Successful game playing requires, in addition to exercise, a natural aptitude and also the study of the theory: a player must analyze parties and study opening variants. It requires that someone possesses enough free time, and is able to teach himself the things or can learn from a book or take lessons from a draughts master – exactly the matters that make up the education of people from the better classes. Therefore, only the better-off could easily increase their knowledge of the game. And so, as I suggest, we can expect top players in the past, resulting from the leading social classes: nobles, representatives of the Church, army officers and merchants.

It is intriguing here to know the opinion of one of the first draughts historians in Holland, in this case the Engineer Gerard Bakker, who had in the past various discussions with Van der Stoep, and indicate here what he stated about the

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<sup>12</sup> **ROBERTI, Giorgio** (1995). *I giochi a Roma di strada e di osteria*. Edition Newton Compton, Roma, pp. 365-368.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

origin of the Draughts game<sup>13</sup> in the Dutch Draughts Magazine “De Problemist” in 2000.

### About the origin of the draughts game.

In a foreword and introduction of [the book] *Dammen zonder dammen en Dame blanche* I have (both cases with some words) indicated a connection between (the titles of) these books and *the first historical draughts game* such as that must have occurred around 1500 in Spain. It is known to me that Arie van der Stoep has been graduated on a doctoral thesis with the title *About the origin of the word draughts game* and it has not escaped me that he believes (and now writes literally) that he with that work has uncovered the origin of the draughts game. If the language facts of Arie van der Stoep points toward a prehistoric draughts game, of which the board, pieces, game and players are still to be discovered, then I take note of this information. I am of the opinion that history cannot be reduced to language.

However, Bakker is not the only historian that has discrepancies with Van der Stoep. Jean Michel Mehl (1946) is expert in the Medieval History about the games. He graduated in 1988 in Paris precisely on the games played in France. One thing is clear for Mehl<sup>14</sup> the draughts game was unknown in France in Medieval times and his final words about draughts in France are disastrous for the vision of Van der Stoep:

Même si le jeu de dames a existé, il n’a connu aucune popularité avant le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Translation:

Even if the draughts game would have existed, it had not experienced popularity before the sixteenth century.

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<sup>13</sup> **BAKKER, Ir. Gerard** (2000). Van der Stoep gecorrigeerd. In: Dutch Draughts Magazine “Het Nieuwe Damspel”, Number 60, February, pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> **MEHL, JEAN-MICHEL** (1990). Les jeux au royaume de France du XIII<sup>e</sup> au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, Editions Fayard. Pág. 147

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

There existed in France a checkered board of 36 squares (18 blacks and 18 whites), but this game has nothing to do with draughts. The gameboards specialist Murray says: “Five mentions of draughts between 1200 and 1400 do not point to any great popularity in the Middle Ages<sup>15</sup>”. The draughts historian Kruijswijk says: “that it did not produce more traces than a scarce number of references must mean that the game did not belong to the leading board games<sup>16</sup>”.

The draughts historian Gerard Bakker can accept the various statements or theory of Van der Stoep<sup>17</sup> neither. For Van der Stoep, any checkered board in France with pieces is

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<sup>15</sup> **MURRAY, Harold James Ruthven.** (1952) A history of Board-games other than chess, Oxford, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> **KRUIJSWIJK, Karel Wendel** (1966). Algemene historie en bibliografie van het damspel, Den Haag, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> **BAKKER, Gerard** (1992). Middeleeuws dammen? (Medieval draughts?). In: Het Nieuwe Damspel, Number 3, pp. 64-69.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



Apparantly a game played with pawns.  
Altar painting of St. Nicholas, St. Peter and Sta. Clara, 14th  
Century, Museo de Mallorca at Palma (Spain)

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

immediately baptized as a draughts game. However, my theorem is that checkered boards with different sizes as the chess board before 1495 cannot be considered to be a draughts game. The draughts game is a continuation of the Alquerque-12 game. Consequently, people played it in the beginning with 12 pieces. Consequently, when I see a checkered board in Spain with fewer squares than a chess board and earlier than the year 1495 I do not believe it to be a draughts game. An example is an altar painting that can be found in the Museum of Mallorca (Spain). Hereafter it follows, and it is of the 14th century<sup>18</sup>.

It is now time to study with care the work of William Shelley Branch since he had a good feeling of the origin of the draughts game being in Spain.



**Govert Westerveld**

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<sup>18</sup> Homo Ludens (1994): Der spielende Mensch IV, Internationale Beiträge des Institutes für Spielforschung und Spielpädagogik an der Hochschule "Mozarteum" - Salzburg. Herausgegeben von Prof. Mag. Dr. Günther C. Bauer, p. 201.

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

# **THE HISTORY OF CHECKERS (DRAUGHTS)**

**WILLIAM SHELLEY BRANCH,  
AND HIS SPANISH ORIGIN OF  
THE GAME**

**WRITTEN BETWEEN**

**OCTOBER 8, 1911 – APRIL 14, 1912**

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

**8 October 1911**

I have been asked by the checker editor of the Pittsburg Leader to write a short series of articles sketching the history of the game of checkers, generally called draughts by English-speaking persons other than Americans. I am not a draughts expert, though I play the game occasionally, and have composed a few problems that were thought good enough to print. But I have made a special study of the history of chess and draughts - commencing it many years ago - and in later years was assisted as to getting translations of or extracts from ancient manuscripts and books in various languages and some foreign works in modern languages, by a now well-known scholar in these matters, H.J.R. Murray, of Cambridge, son of Dr. Sir J. Murray, of Oxford University fame, and the New English Dictionary.

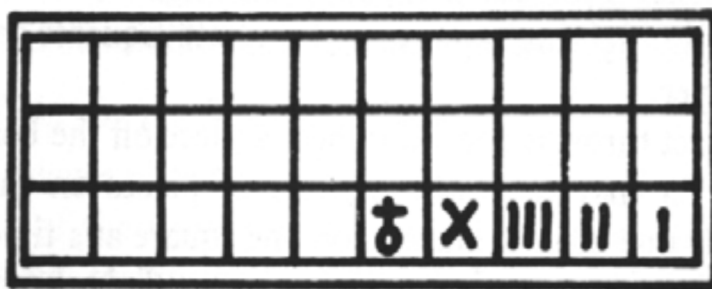
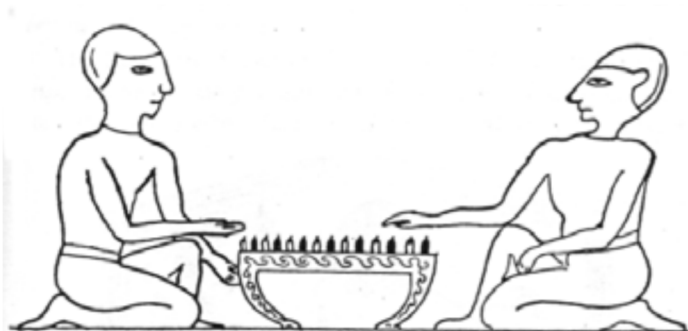


**Harold James Ruthven Murray**

I have also read everything in English of any value that has been published concerning the history of these games, and many references to them in old and general literature. There is not so much known historically of draughts as of chess: the material of its early history is scanty, and the details of the construction and

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

rules of the most ancient forms of draughts are lost, though from some hints here and there in ancient Latin and -slightly- Egyptian literature attempts have been made to reconstruct both the Egyptian and Roman forms of draughts, as the games may be called, although they were so different from our checkers" that an ordinary player would see no likeness beyond the fact that the games were played with "men" on a board. But the object of the game was the same: to capture all of the opponents' men or prevent them from moving.



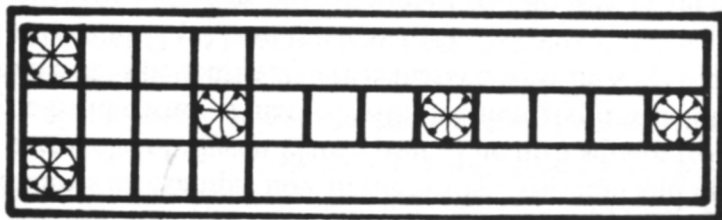
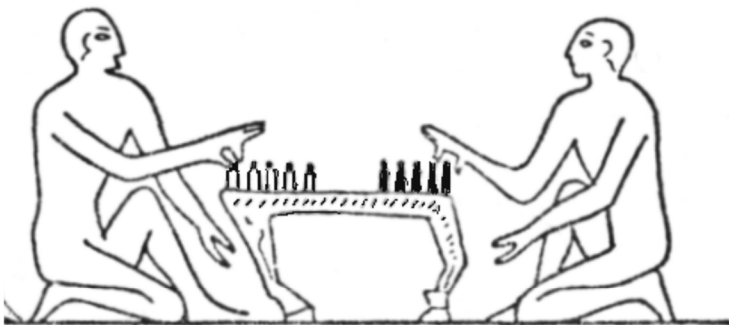
**Game of Twenty Squares/ Game of Senet  
(3000 BC in an Egyptian burial)**

The "moves" were different from those of modern draughts, and captures were not made by leaping one man over another to the next square beyond. The boards were generally unchecked -the squares all of one colour- and if any were checkered this was



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

merely for ornament. On a board of two colours the "men" could have moved from one colour to the other. There was no "single corner" and there is no evidence of a 64-square board at all. The Egyptian boards that have been discovered have less than 64, and the Roman boards probably had more though none has been found.

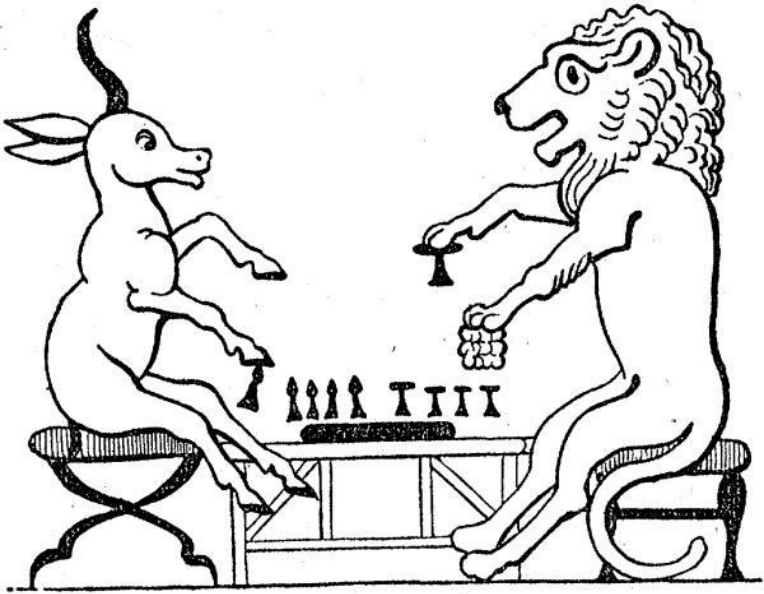


**Game of Tau**

The games were not draughts, as now understood, but they were of the nature of draughts and not of chess. But neither of them was the game from which modern draughts has descended. They simply expressed and for a long period satisfied the mental desire -now perhaps 10,000 years old- for a game of calculation and foresight in which the object of each player is to capture all the "men" of the other side, with one or more of his own left on the board. The parent of our checkers was of later origin, probably "A.D." but perhaps earlier. It originated, as far as can be known, among the Arabians or Saracens, and was not played

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

on a board of squares at all but on one of lines. I will deal with this, the real parent of "draughts" presently, but first should like to say a little more of what we may call the uncles or aunts: the Egyptian and Roman games of a draughts-like nature, extinct many centuries ago. Of the Egyptian game, played 2,000 years B.C., and no doubt earlier, as well as much later, there are actual relics on view in the museums: some of the "men" and a few fragments of boards. The men are shaped, some like chess pawns, and some have heads like animals.



Egyptian Draughts. (From a papyrus in the British Museum.)

One complete board, which belonged to a queen of Egypt, has been claimed for "draughts" but it would puzzle anyone to play draughts on it, for it has only 30 squares and these are arranged

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

in three rows of 10 each. On the back of this board are 20 more squares, 12 in the centre row and four in each of the others.



**Game of Twenty Squares/ Game of Senet  
(3000 BC in an Egyptian burial) – Sourced from Wikipedia**

The board was probably used for a kind of backgammon on one side, and some other game on the other. Dice have been found with or near the boards, and I should have concluded that the Egyptian games were all backgammon but for certain pictures found on some walls, and well preserved by the covering sand, etc., of persons playing a game which looks like draughts and shows no signs of the use of dice, and also of game references in the papyrus Mss to a game which suggests a form of draughts. One of these refers to a player taking three "men" at once. So it is concluded that the ancient Egyptians played some kind of draughts, as well as backgammon. They certainly did not play chess, which game originated in India at a later period (before 500 A.D., but probably later than 200 A.D.).

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Senet Board inscribed with the name of Amunhotep III  
(Brooklyn Museum)**

**15 October 1911**

The Romans, during the classic period of Roman history, and for some time after, played a highly scientific game of draughts, judging not so much from the little that is actually known of it as

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

from the following lines translated from a Latin poem of the time. It was written by Salejus Bassus (mentioned by Juvenal) and addressed to C. Piso, who was evidently one of the best players of the day:

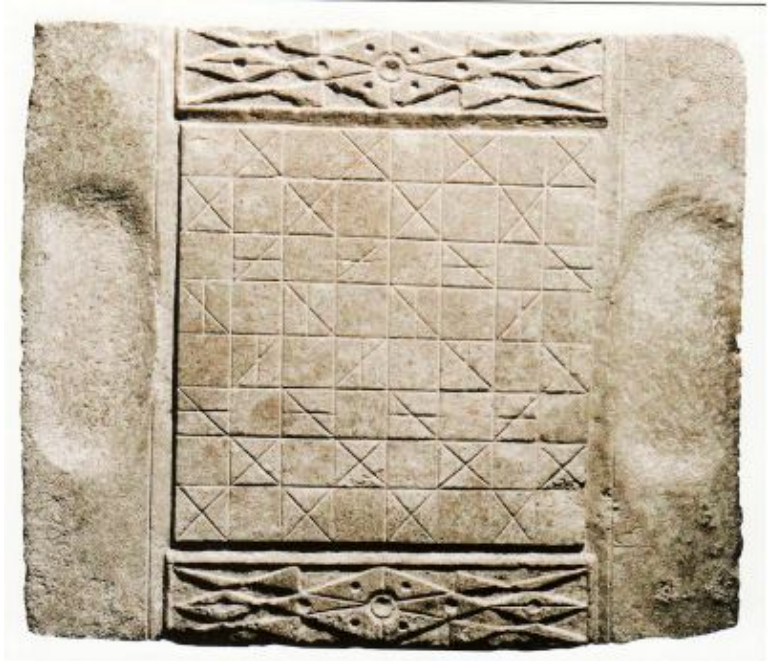
### LAUSPISONIS (First translation into English)

When to relieve the labours of thy mind,  
Thou turn'st from deep research in arts refined,  
Not in soft indolence you waste the hour,  
But happier genius still exerts its power,  
To mimic war the radiant troops are led,  
And martial ranks the varied table spread;  
There sable bands, and here a snow-white train,  
With doubtful fate of war the fight maintain;  
But who with thee shall dare dispute the field?  
Led by thy hand, when warrior knows to yield?  
Or if he fall, he falls with glorious pride,  
His vanquished foe extended by his side.  
Unnumbered stratagems thy forces try;  
Now artful feign, and only feign, to fly;  
Now boldly rushes, 'midst the ranks of war,  
The chief, who view'd the slaught'ring scenes from far.  
This", bravely daring in the arduous toil,  
Repels the host advancing to the spoil;  
While cautious "that" moves dreadful on and slow,  
And fraudulent meditates the certain blow,  
What though in guise a slave he seems, in chains;  
But see yon hero, with impetuous haste,  
Burst through the ranks and lay the ramparts waste!  
While thus the mighty battle glows around,  
And prostrate chiefs bestrew the well-fought ground,  
Full and unbroken, lo! thy squadrons stand,  
Or scarce one warrior lost of thy command;  
The captive crowds thy victory proclaim,  
And foes confess thy undisputed fame.

When these lines were first translated into English, more than a century ago, it was thought that they referred to chess. The line "The chief who views the scene from far" seems to fit chess, but another line shows that "prostrate chiefs bestrew the ground",

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

with the game still going on. Also it is now known that the game of chess was brought into Europe from Asia several centuries after the time of Bassus. The poem can only refer to what was the best indoor game the Romans had -the Ludus Latrunculorum- mentioned by several of the Latin writers of the classic period and by one or two later.



**Ludus Latrunculorum**

The chief information that can be got from them is that the game was one of calculation and skill, and was played on a board of squares, that the capture of a "man" was effected by catching him between two of the opposite colour, that the "moves" were "short" moves, and not long moves like a chess Rook or Bishop, and that the "men" were generally made of glass, though sometimes of ivory.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Roman board game pieces<sup>1</sup>.**

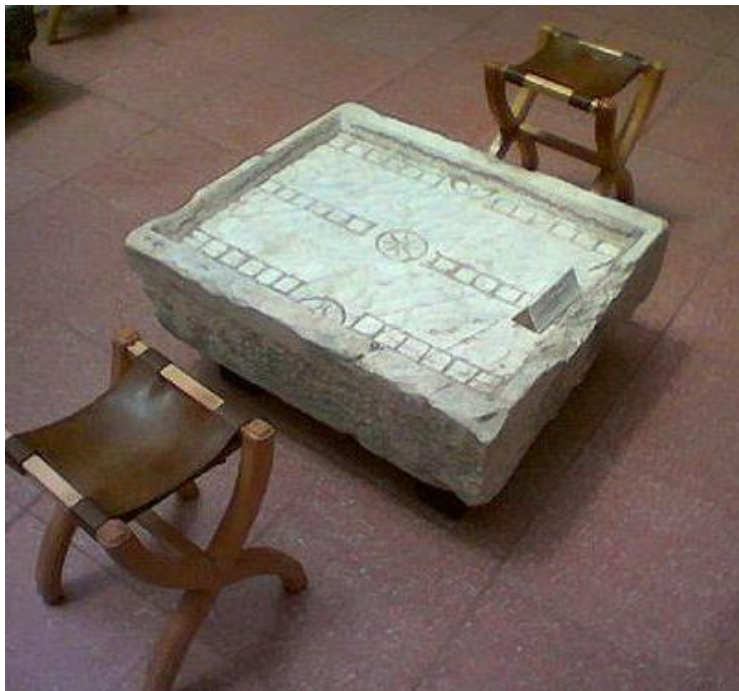
The game appears to have become extinct by the eighth century, but may have lived till later. It was probably never very popular among the multitude, who preferred games of chance. This being so the game was, I think, among the class of people who did play it superseded by chess and “alquerque”, another form of draughts which came from the east. The political and social

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<sup>1</sup> Romans loved board games and knew lots of them. They played the games everywhere they could. When there was no board available for some reason, they often carved a board onto the street, wall or a roof tile.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

changes which followed the break-up of the Roman empire may have had something to do with it.



**Ludus duodecim scriptorum<sup>2</sup> table in the museum at Ephesus**

But the game was certainly too good to die out unless superseded by something better. As to “the moves” I should have mentioned that the rather obscure Latin in one or two references to the game implies that the pieces did not all move alike, and that half of those on each side moved, one square at a time, like a chess Rook, and the other half, one square at a time like a chess Bishop or modern draughtsman.

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<sup>2</sup> Backgammon is said to be the oldest game in history. The ancient Romans played a game, Ludus Duodecim Scriptorum (“Twelve-lined Game”), which was identical, or nearly so, to modern backgammon.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Checked Roman Board of 144 squares<sup>3</sup> (Turkey)**

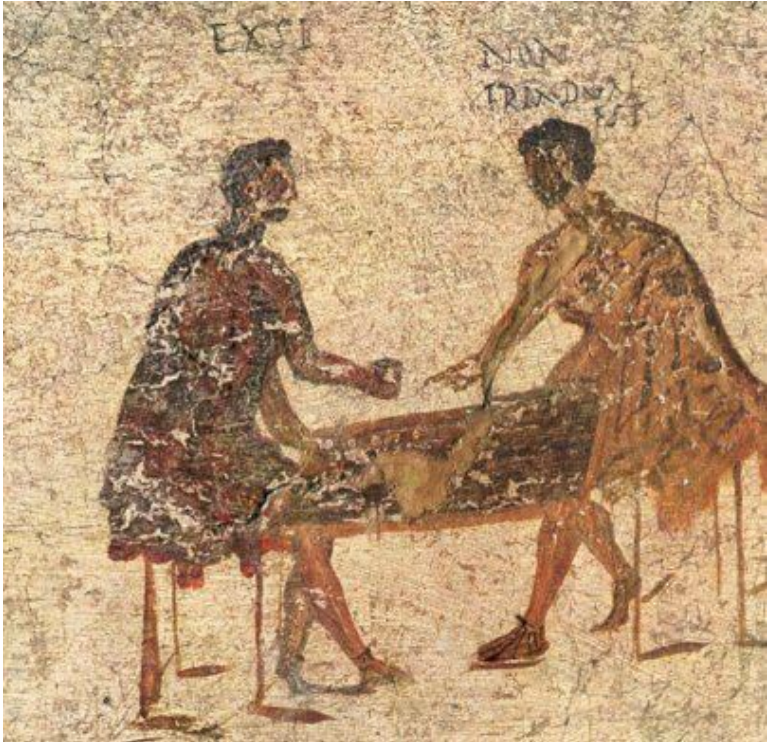
Also that there was some extra power gained by reaching the other side of the board. Such further complications in the game seem to be required to account for such scientific play as that spoken of in the poem. I have read Falkener's "Games Ancient and Oriental", but believe his "reconstructed" Roman (and Egyptian) draughts to be very imaginative<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> A giant poolside mosaic featuring intricate geometric patterns has been unearthed in southern Turkey, revealing the far-reaching influence of the Roman Empire at its peak.

<sup>4</sup> Strange enough most people believed Falkener and lateron Murray. Branch in the very beginning had a very good feeling of the real sitation of draughts.

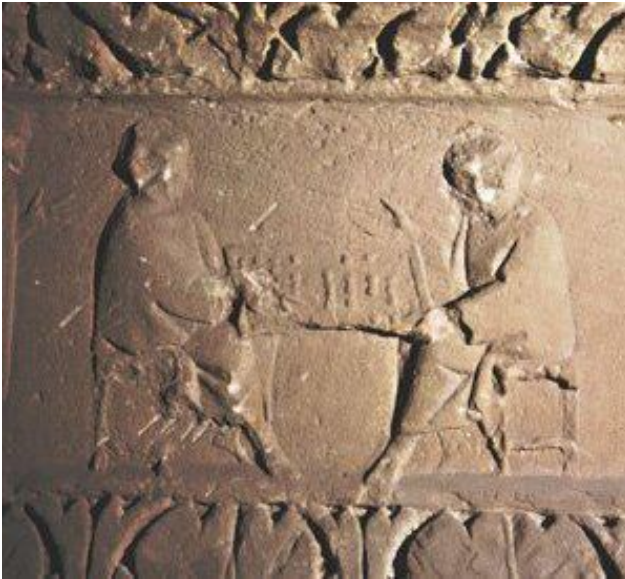
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Two citizens of Pompeii, playing a dice game**

But the important point is that he also agrees that both games were very different from modern draughts. During all the time we have been referring to, other games of a draughts-like nature existed in various parts of the world, some played on boards of squares, others on boards of lines. These latter were called “merrels” by western Europeans, and in England, at a later time, also “morris games”, probably from the word “Moorish” or “Moors”, like the morris dance. What seems to be the best kind of merrels was brought into Spain by the Moors, and was by the Spaniards called “Alquerque”. A simpler form was in England, called “The nine men’s morris”, and is mentioned by Shakespeare. This game is still played in rural parts of England.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Two Romans playing Tabula<sup>5</sup>**

**22 October 1911**

Of draughts-like games, in principle, played on boards of squares, sometimes black and white, there is evidence in ancient Scandinavian and Celtic literature, especially in Irish and Welsh. The games have been claimed as “chess” -and their ancient names have been translated as “chess”- but they were not chess, and they were played before chess was known in Europe or to the Arabians. And they were not draughts as now understood. In Ireland the game was called “fithcheall”, and was long popular.

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<sup>5</sup> Two Romans playing Tabula on a board across their knees. The organized arrangement of the chips or counters in rows indicates that this game is Tabula, as opposed to Duodecim Scriptorum, in which the chips would have been stacked (on 30 squares).

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Fithcheall (Fidchell) board**

(It probably continued there till superseded by modern draughts, and to some extent chess, though chess has never been really popular among the Celtic race). A similar game, called hnef-tafl ("tafl" meaning game-table or board) was played among the Danes and Norsemen, including King Canute, of England, and others of his race in this country, and no doubt it was known to the Saxons. Several ancient stories connected with Canute or his relatives in Norway and Denmark used to be claimed as belonging to chess, but the authorities on the subject now hold that the game was "hnef-tafl", and that there is no evidence of chess in England before the Norman conquest, 1066.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



### Hnef Tafl

Well, it may well be asked-after all this-when and where did the game of draughts, as now understood, originate? Neither the when or the where has been proved conclusively, but the evidence points to Spain, at about 1300. If the game did not originate in Spain it began among the Saracens and Moors, earlier than 1300, and was taken to Spain by them. But there is a great deal of Arabic literature of that and earlier periods still preserved, and there is no mention of or reference to the game of draughts. There is much about chess, including some actual game records and many problems, with solutions and technical notes. But there is no reference to the game of draughts in the literature or chronicles of either the Christian or the Mohammedan world (still in existence) until we find it in English of about 1380. It had then evidently become a common game in England, and it is known that it was also in Spain. But there is good reason to believe that as late as 1283 it was unknown in Spain, or at any rate Christian Spain -part of the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

south was then under Moorish rule and was Mohammedan- or any other part of Christendom. King Alfonso X of Spain ordered the compilation of a book describing every board game and every indoor game with any skill in it. This was done in 1283, and the book is preserved in a great library near Madrid. It is, of course, written; for printing was not invented in 1283.

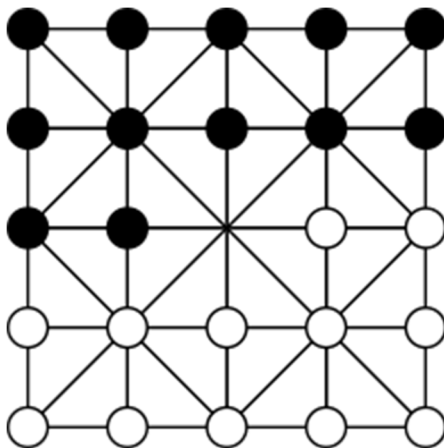


**Alquerque-12 game**

Many copies and translations of this work have been made, some complete, others of the chess portion only, which is the largest, because of numerous problems (or diagrams) and their solutions. No mention of draughts is made, or of any game nearer to it than alquerque, or a form of merrels with more men than the others have. The games dealt with are chess, merrels in several forms-including alquerque with a diagram showing the board and the men placed for play-backgammon, and another dice game. Modern students of this book see that alquerque very much resembled modern draughts except in the appearance of the board. The Moors called this game al-kirk, and the Arabic world had had it a long time before the Spaniards knew it. Here

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

is the diagrams from King Alfonso's MS, showing the board and the men set for play.



**Alquerque-12 game**

The rules below are also from his work: The men moved along the lines in any direction, from one point of intersection to the next one. They captured by leaping over as in draughts. They could move, and capture, backwards as well as sideways and forward: so there was no promotion to "king". Several men might be taken in one move, just as with kings in draughts. The "take" was compulsory, as in draughts. This information, coming after all the other evidence, settles the matter. We see here the game from which draughts was evolved. The Spaniards like the Moors, played this game on the board of lines and called it alquerque. It may have been known in Spain in the eighth century, but there is no evidence of it being played on a chessboard or a board of squares till the fourteenth century<sup>6</sup>. When it was, the game was changed to some extent, from the difference in the board. The game became modern draughts through being transferred to the chessboard, about 1300 A.D.,

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<sup>6</sup> This is something that has not been proven.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

possibly rather earlier among the Moors of Spain or of North Africa. It continued to be called alquerque when played on the chessboard, for a long time in Spain<sup>7</sup>. In Turkey and the east another form of the game grew in favour, also played on the chessboard, and now known to us as Turkish draughts.



### Turkish draughts (<http://www.globespots.com>)

The men move "straight" instead of diagonally, and this difference is doubtless due to the fact that, unlike the Spanish and European chessboards, in general the Turkish are nearly always unchecked.

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<sup>7</sup> In the kingdom Aragon of Spain, at the end of the XV century, the game suddenly had the name of Marro de Punta. In the kingdom of Castille, people effectively continue calling the game alquerque during some years, changing it for the term "juego de las damas" (not "juego de damas") around 1550.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Alquerque-9 game<sup>8</sup>**

The squares are plainly marked, but are all of one colour. With a checkered board it was thought best to keep the men moving on lines of squares of one colour. This created "the single corner", which was an improvement. Another was the new rule-probably suggested by the use of the chessboard and the promoting of Pawns in chess to "Queens" when they reach the other side of the board-which provided that the men should not be able to move backwards until they were promoted for crossing the board. Then they were called Dames-as Queens in chess were called-and hence the Spanish name for the game, "damas", which in time superseded the name alquerque".

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<sup>8</sup> This is an ancient Roman game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Alquerque-3 game<sup>9</sup>**

**29 October 1911**

The ordinary game of draughts was called alquerque in Spain for a long<sup>10</sup> time before it was known as “damas”: the game of the dames, or ladies. This information added to that given about alquerque in the Alfonso MS removes the last doubt as to the direct connection of the two games. We see that one grew from the other. We are, in fact, now playing the ancient Arabic game

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<sup>9</sup> Another ancient Roman game.

<sup>10</sup> We think that the game of draughts (juego de las damas) with the long queen (dama) was invented in 1495, immediately with the name Marro de Punta in the kingdom of Aragon (Spain). In the kingdom of Castille, the new game (a mixture of alquerque and the chessboard) continued under the name of Alquerque till around 1550.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

on a board of squares instead of lines, with some restrictions in the movements of the men and some changes in the game, making the game more scientific. I think that the change began with experiments on the chessboard, to see what sort of a game of alquerque could be played on it, perhaps because there was no alquerque board handy. It was found a game could be played, and this was afterwards improved and studied. It was also found convenient to have only one board for chess and draughts. Chess had become very popular in Spain, and there would be a chessboard in nearly every well-to-do house. Chess and draughts are indeed "sister games", but the answer to the question "Which is the elder?" is not a simple one. For although the chessboard is nearly or quite a thousand years older than the game of draughts as played on that board, yet our game of draughts, just as now played, is more than a century older than chess as now played. The game of chess has greatly changed since the fifteenth century, and an ordinary modern expert could not play "old chess" well if his life depended on it. It would require several lessons and much practice, and no European chess player, or only half a dozen antiquarians among them, have given the old form of the game, during the past three centuries, sufficient study to feel at all "at home" with it. The game was revolutionized about 1470 in Italy<sup>11</sup> -later in England-by the transformation of the "Queen" from a very weak piece (weaker than the King or the Knight) into the strongest of the pieces<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>11</sup> José Antonio Garzón Roger proved that the game was an invention in 1475 in Valencia (Spain).

Garzón, José Antonio (2006), "The Return of Francesch Vicent. The History of the Birth and Expansion of Modern Chess"; translated by Manuel Pérez Carballo. (Foreword Anatoli Karpov). Generalitat Valenciana, Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esport: Fundació Jaume II el Just, Valencia. ISBN 84-482-4194-0.

<sup>12</sup> Westerveld, Govert (1997). The influence of the Queen Isabel I of Castille on the new powerful dama in the origin of the draughts and modern chess game. In collaboration-ship with Rob Jansen, University of Amsterdam. Dutch language. ISBN 84-605-6372-3 - 329 pages.

Westerveld, Govert (2004). "La reina Isabel la Católica, su reflejo en la dama poderosa de Valencia, cuna de ajedrez moderno y origen del juego de damas". In collaboration-ship with José Antonio Garzón Roger, Valencia. (Prólogo de Prof. Dr. Juan Torres Fontes). Generalidad Valenciana, Secretaría Automòmica de Cultura. ISBN 84-482-3718-8

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

and also by a great change in the Bishop's move and power, and in three other ways of less importance ("Castling", Pawn promotion to other than Queen, and as the result of "stalemate").



### **José Antonio Garzón Roger**

So draughts as now understood by practical players -knowing nothing of more ancient forms of draughts- is older by a century at least than the game of chess as now played. Draughts as we know it is about 600 years old, or perhaps 500 if we allow for some slight changes in the rules in the fourteenth century. Chess as now played in Europe and America is less than four centuries old. This applies to chess everywhere else, except to Asia east of India, and the chess there, chiefly Chinese and Japanese, is very different from European or Indian. Our game of draughts is not quite the same in all countries. There are differences, of more or less importance, in Spain, Italy etc., from the Anglo-American game, and greater differences in Turkey and farther east. There is also "Polish"<sup>13</sup> draughts", more played in France and Belgium than in Poland, but this is an enlarged form of ordinary draughts,

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<sup>13</sup> Polish was used in France in the sense of strange. The Polish or International draughts game was invented in Holland.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

just as there used to be in Europe and still is in India to some extent an enlarged chess, played on a board of 100 squares.



**Polish draughts or International draughts**

Polish draughts is a very scientific game, and has its own problem-art. It is little known in England, but I have met two or three who can play it. The game became fashionable in France in the seventeenth century, and its origin has some connection with Poland, but I forget what it was. In Germany, besides ordinary draughts and Polish draughts, the game is often played on an ordinary board in this way: all the men move like our Kings-as in the ancient alquerque- and the Kings (so made by promotion of men reaching the further side of the board) move any distance like chess Bishops, but capture as our draughts Kings do. I think it likely that this game is a direct continuation of alquerque on the chess board, as first introduced to Germany from Spain through France, with the promotion to extra powerful Kings added later. But it may have been a more modern idea: an unconscious return to the ancient. Before getting to the little that is known of draughts in England before the eighteenth century, I will sum up the matter of the relative antiquity of draughts and chess: the votaries of each have

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

generally claimed the greater antiquity for their own game, and in certain senses both are right. Draughts games in principle are much older than chess, though chess is older than the game of draughts as played now. But our game of draughts as now played is older than chess as played now.

### 5 November 1911

I should have mentioned that not only the mode of capture and the compulsory take are the same in modern draughts and ancient alquerque, but also the huff, and this again is an important bit of evidence connecting the two games. No doubt the huffing rule passed with the others-so far as they could well be applied-to alquerque on the chessboard. But I know of no reference to it till the seventeenth century. There may, however, be one in the oldest existing account of the game of draughts, a manuscript in Italian, written in the early part of the sixteenth century, and preserved at the library of Perugia<sup>14</sup>. I regret that I have not been able to see a copy of this, but I was informed, some years ago, that the rules laid down are the same as in modern Italian draughts. The first two printed books on draughts are lost. They were both Spanish and printed at Valencia, one by Torquemada -a Spanish expert- in 1547, and the other in 1590. It would be a lucky find for anyone who came across one of these books, especially the first, if he had some idea of its value before he sold it<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Garzón stipulated the manuscript to be of the year 1502. Cf.:

Garzón, José Antonio (2006), "The Return of Francesch Vicent. The History of the Birth and Expansion of Modern Chess"; translated by Manuel Pérez Carballo. (Foreword Anatoli Karpov). Generalitat Valenciana, Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esport: Fundació Jaume II el Just, Valencia. ISBN 84-482-4194-0.

<sup>15</sup> A copy of the book in question is in my possession and I still have to publish a book about it. The other book is of 1591, not 1590 and was written by Pedro Ruiz Montero. I published already about it.

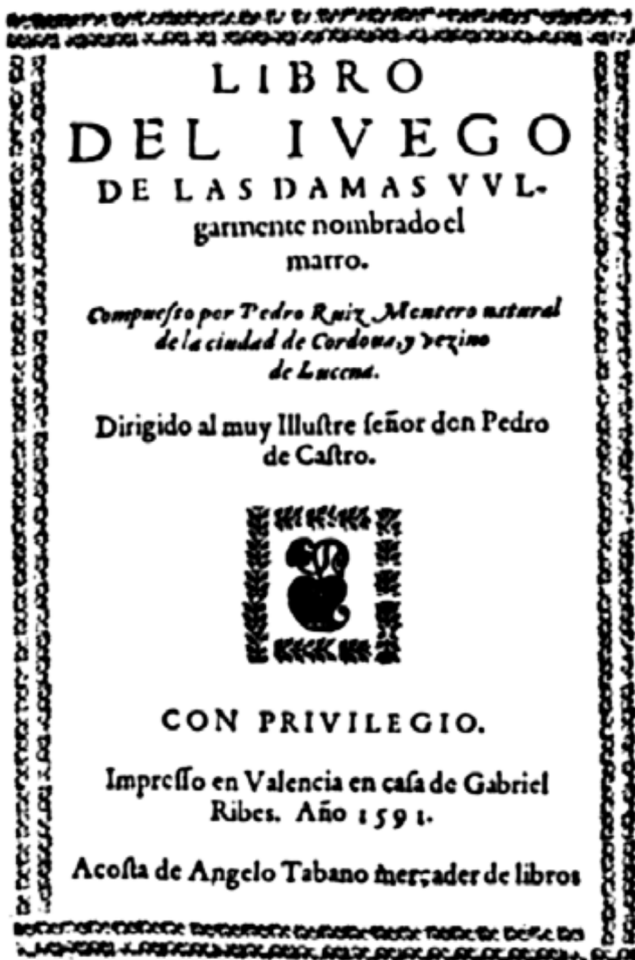
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The same applies to the first printed chess book dealing with the practical side of the game and problems -only a single title -page remains-of 1495, also printed at Valencia. But a copy of a later edition of the 1590 draughts work, printed in 1597, is preserved at Berlin<sup>16</sup>. A reprint of this-the oldest existing printed draughts book-would be of much interest. I presume that the rules agree with modern Spanish draughts. I will refer to the next published draughts works later on, but wish to say a little more of the earlier period of the game, of which so little is known. But that little is of interest and importance from the historical point of view.

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<sup>16</sup> The edition of 1590 did not have a later edition. Branch is referring to the book of Lorenzo Valls of 1597.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



The book of Pedro Ruiz Montero, 1591



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

### LIBRO DEL IVEGO DELAS DAMAS, POR OTRO NOM- BRE EL MARRO DE PVNTA, diuidido en tres tratados.

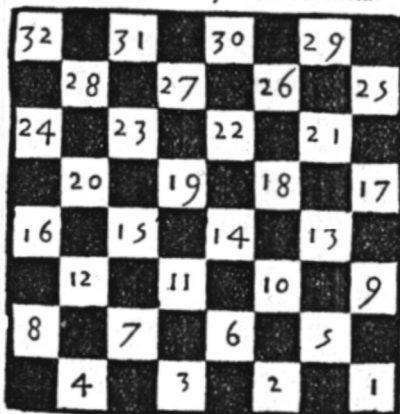
El primero contiene en si 17. tretas con sus lances no uistas hasta hoy.

El segundo, contiene en si once tretas con sus lances, para contra quien sabe el libro que compuso Pedro Ruiz Montero, porque en qualquier parte lo juegan, > se puede ganar con mucha facilidad.

El tercero, trata como se ha de jugar dama contra dama, cõtiene en si 22. tretas con sus lances.

Con un lance a la postre que Pedro Ruiz Montero la da por ganado en su libro y es tabla forçosa.

Compuesto por Lorenzo Valls vezino de la ciudad  
de Alicante en el reyno de Valencia.



CON LICENCIA.

Impresso en Valencia en casa de Pedro Patricio. Año 1597.  
A costa de Angelo Tabago.

The book of Lorenzo Valls, 1597

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The Spanish writer Bellet tells us that draughts was in its early days in Spain called “marro de punta”, and afterwards by the more polite term of Damas (ladies). And that in Sicily, 800 and more years ago, it was known as “marrella”. These words “marro” and “marrella”, the general name for a group of board games which the Arabians and Moors called al-kirk, and of which “al-kirk with 12 men a side” was the most elaborate, and the most highly thought of<sup>17</sup>. This is the game of which I have given a diagram. It is mentioned in Arabic literature much older than the time of King Alfonso’s MS.



**José Brunet y Bellet**

Now our game of draughts would not have been called “merrels” in Spain and Sicily if it had then been an ancient game in itself. Independently of any recent connection with one of the merrels games-which were all played on boards of lines, either with 12 men a side, or nine, or five, or three, which latter game was practically the schoolboys game of “noughts and

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<sup>17</sup> It is clear that Branch refers to the book of:  
Brunet y Bellet, José (1890). *El Ajedrez. Investigaciones sobre su origen*. Barcelona.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

crosses" -merrels or alquerque, as the Spaniards got to calling it from the Arabic "al- kirk", with 12 men a side, was the most scientific game of these merrels games, and after these had become common and played on the chessboard instead of, or as well as, on the old al-kirk board of stone, with some modification of the rules to fit the new board. It was an ancient game, probably quite as ancient as chess, but transferred to the chessboard, probably for more than one reason. It was convenient to have only one board for the two games of chess and alquerque, or for three games, because the back of the chessboard or the alquerque was frequently marked for backgammon. Another consideration is that the "men" for backgammon were kept with the chessboard, marked also for backgammon, and so could be used on the chess board for the modified alquerque, or as we call it draughts. Then it was found that the new kind of alquerque, especially after the promotion to kings rule was made, and the scientific effect of the "single corner" was discovered, made a very good game. It soon rivalled or exceeded the popularity of chess, being for one thing more easily learnable as to its rudimentary part, and, for another, it was in its new form some- thing new. This must have been about 1300 A.D. in Spain<sup>18</sup>, and soon after in France, Italy and England. The game-on the 64 square board-was not played among the Spaniards in and before 1283 or anywhere else so far as can be discovered. As I have stated it is not mentioned in King Alfonso's compendium of board-games known in Spain in 1283. But it may have been played among the Moors before that date, perhaps for 20 or 30 years, hardly more, or the Spaniards would have known it<sup>19</sup>. Looking up my account of the Alfonso book of which I wrote before from memory, I find it has a greater variety of games than I mentioned. There are three sorts of chess, the ordinary of the time and two others, little played, with many chess problems, copies of which I have and there are

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<sup>18</sup> We think on the year 1495. Ounce discovered the lost book of Francesch Vicent, published in Valencia, 1495 we will know more.

<sup>19</sup> Again we do not believe in the XIV century. According to our knowledge the Alquerque-12 game played on a chess book took place in Spain in the XV century.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

three kinds of alquerque, with the diagram for one that I have given, and another that is like "Fox and Geese" -played on the same board as "alquerque de doze" -and there are 15 kinds of backgammon, an "astronomical game" (something like the "philosopher's game" of a later period) and 12 kinds of dice games other than backgammon.



**Fox and Gees (Spanish: cercar la liebre)**

The important points from our present point of view are: first, the game of draughts (by any name) is not mentioned, as it certainly would have been if it existed in Spain, and second, a game very similar in principle to, though simpler than, our draughts is described more completely than in any other book, and a diagram given showing the board and the 12 men a side set for play. Evidence from other sources, later than 1283, connects this game with modern checkers.

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

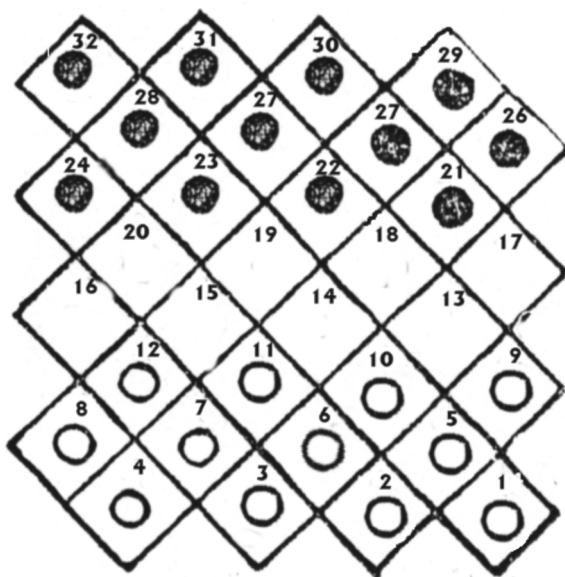
The English must have begun to know the merrels or alquerque on the chess-board game -which from now on I will call simply draughts- early in the fourteenth century (or perhaps in the last few years of the thirteenth because it was quite popular in England by 1380, and it must have taken a long time for any new game to get well-known all over the County in those days. But it may have come direct from Spain, instead of through France, and in that case might be popular in England before 1350. It was at first called "Damas", then "Dames".

This name, one of three used in Spain, has been well explained by Mr. H.J. Murray as follows: "The name damas or dames was borrowed from chess and refers to the identity of move (but not of capture) of the draughtsman and the queen in old chess. Hence, first, draughts is older than new chess, or the name (Damas) would be inappropriate; second, draughts is younger than the change (abroad) in name of the chess queen from 'fers' and 'queen' to 'dame'; third, draughts arose in a country in which dame or dama was the usual name for the queen. Such a country could only have been Italy, Spain or France. It was probably Spain, and probably the game was invented about 1300." I think it was invented a few years before 1300, and may have been among the Moors between 1250 and 1290.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**12 November 1911**

Checkers as played throughout the English-Speaking world, and occasionally outside it, is now the predominant form of the game: it has more players than any other form, and a larger literature than the rest combined. It is a little different from Spanish draughts (see Keafs Sturges) and so it is evident that either the English, French or Spaniards, long ago, made the difference. Which it was is one of the things I should like to know. So far as can be ascertained the game has always been played in the same way in England, with Scotland, and I know of no evidence of any change in Spanish draughts after it had become customary to play it on a board of 64 squares. But there was probably a short period when the men all had the power of moving backwards, just like our Kings, and when, therefore, there was no promotion of men to Kings.



**Lallement Board**

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

This promotion rule, which improved the game, was probably made before either French or English knew the game<sup>20</sup>. The difference in the rules which created a difference between Spanish and English draughts may have been made in Spain later, and after the English had got accustomed to their own game. Or it may have been made in France or England in the fourteenth century. As I am now parting with the old "Alquerque" board I may mention that a "chess" board is not required for draughts at all. Its use is customary and convenient, but the game can be played without it and has been. It could be played on a board of 32 spots or circles, but I think the best would be (apart from a chess board) the "Lallement Draughts board", invented by a Frenchman of that name some years ago, more than 30, I think<sup>21</sup>. The board (with its border) is square, but instead of containing 64 squares, it has 32 diamonds. There is no difference in the game whatever, and the ordinary notation is used, so that printed games or problems can be played over just as usual. Thirty-two useless squares are got rid of, that is all. The diamonds are so placed that we get the double corner effect just the same. Each "diamond" is a square, but it looks like a diamond to the two players. Some American admirers of this board-which may be better known among the readers of this journal than in England-perpetrated the following lines:

The time will come when Checker cranks  
On chess boards will not play,  
When neither Scots, Canucks, or Yanks  
Will rack their brains that way.  
Nail to the mast the old Chess board,  
Set all her threadbare Sails;  
Give her to Steinitz and all his horde,  
The Lallement prevails.

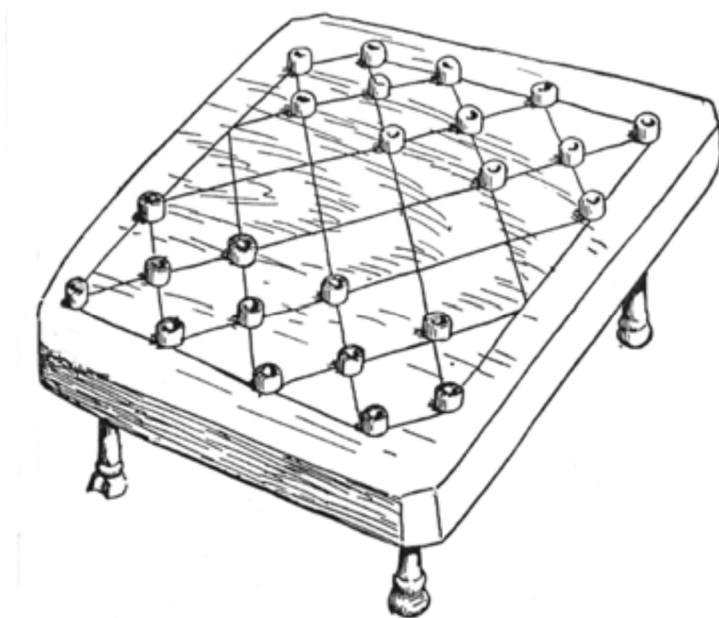
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<sup>20</sup> We agree with Branch to that.

<sup>21</sup> See 14 January 1912: Notes; and 21 January 1912

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

“Canucks”, I am told, is American for Canadians. Steinitz was the Chess champion when these lines were written. A board on the same principle as the “Lallement” has been used for Centuries in the Philippine Islands. The natives Call it Dama, and many have got the board, as well as the game played on it, from the early Spaniards there. It is simply a board of lines, and we see “alquerque” again, with the men set for play.



**Philippine draughts board**

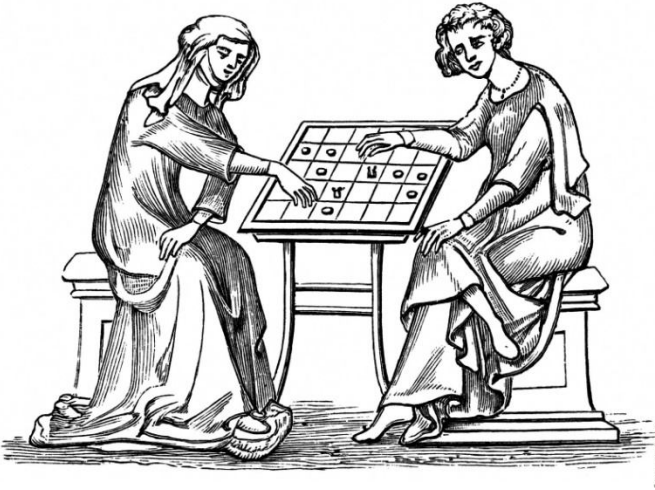
The men of Course move “straight” and not Corner-ways on the ordinary board. Try 11-15, 22-18, 15-22, 25-18, etc., and you will soon find that you could play a game or solve a problem on a board made like this. W. Gardner, the “blindfold” expert, says he always visualises the men as on the Lallement board and not the ordinary, when playing “blindfold”.

From the above, and the Philippine board following, the modern Checker player will see how easily his game Could have been



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

developed from the alquerque game with twelve men on each side on a board of lines. If any reader will make a board like this, of cardboard or wood -but it must be a larger one- he will find that he can play ordinary checkers on it, and play over games from print. I must get back to what remains to be told of the fourteenth Century. The oldest thing in existence with our game of draughts except the game itself, which we know must be 50 or 60 or 70 years older is a drawing in a manuscript now in the British Museum and written about 1350 or 1360. The drawing shows a lady and a young man playing at draughts. It is so described in Green's history of England<sup>22</sup>, and the picture is there given.



**Lady and a young man playing at draughts**

The two players are well drawn, but the artist either did not know, or did not trouble to give, the correct form of the board, which has only thirty squares (all of the same colour) and four of the men are on squares, which they could not get to in draughts. The pieces are flat round discs: seven men and two Kings, made as now by putting one man on another. The incorrect board, with

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<sup>22</sup> Green, J. R. (1902). *A Short History of the English People*. The drawing in the book has nothing to do with draughts.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

some men on wrong squares, was, no doubt, simply a mistake of the artist: we have seen the same sort of thing in modern pictures, both of Chess and draughts. The oldest reference to draughts in English or any other literature is found in an English manuscript written about 1380. It gives a translation of a Norman-French romance written more than a Century earlier, but in that there is no mention of draughts,; it simply speaks of Chess, tables (backgammon) and other games". About 1380 draughts had become so well known that the translator thought the game ought to be mentioned with Chess, and as his translation of the romance was a very "free" one he easily worked it in.

The romance -one of many of that period- was about Charlemagne and heroes of his empire: many things that did not exist or had not happened so far back as Charlemagne's time are brought into the story, but that doesn't matter. One of Charlemagne's Knights tells a "Paynim" -a pagan or heathen, one of the Saracens in the Holy Land- of how the men of France spent their time. Of indoor games he says -in the words of the English writer<sup>23</sup> of 1380- "Those that wish to stay at home play at Chess, and some at the game of Dames, and some at tables". I have modernized the Spelling, but as specimens of old English may be of interest I here give the original:

"Tho that willeth to stay at home: playeth at the eschekkere, and summe of them to the game of Dames<sup>24</sup>, and at tables"

[þo þat willieþ to leue at hame pleyeþ to þe eschekkere, & sum of hem to iew-de-dame: and sum to tablere:]

The next reference to our game, which also is older than anything outside English, is in a manuscript written about 20

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<sup>23</sup> "Sir Ferumbras", c. 1380, ed. London 1897 series Eearly English Text Society

<sup>24</sup> Probably this was a game with chess queens. The term "dame" for the chess queen was already known in France in the XIX century, but not in Spain. The Spaniard borrowed the term dame and donna from France and Italy when they introduced the powerful dama (new chess queen in the chessgame) in the year 1475.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

years later. It is a translation, with additions, of an account of the siege and destruction of Troy<sup>25</sup>, and in a description of the games of the Trojans, it is said (by the Englishman, who adds draughts). The Checker was choisely. There Chosen the first, the draughts, the dyse and other dreggh games. "Other dreggh games" means "other draw games", games of "moves" or "draws". Not drawn games, but each player, whether of Chess, or draughts, or alquerque, or backgammon, made a draw in his turn. This manuscript of about 1400 has the earliest mention of "draughts", a new name of the game, instead of "Dames".



**Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343 – 1400)**

I think the name of "checkers" may have begun, too, or not much later, for a reason which I will give. But since 1400 "draughts" has always in England been considered the usual and proper name, and many players never heard of any other. So far as "checkers" was used in England in old times, I think it was partly a Children's word and partly a rural term. Now it is in

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<sup>25</sup> *The Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, eds. G. A. Panton and D. Donaldson, *EETS* 39, 56 (1869, 1874; reprint as one vol. 1968).

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

more frequent use, after I think, nearly dying out, because of American example and influence. The word "draughts" is simply old English for "moves". It was used by Chess players, and in other games. A turn to play was a turn to make a draught. A bad move was a bad draught. The poet, Chaucer, speaks of "false draughts" in a game of Chess. He means Cheating or illegal moves. Our game, being all "draughts", made with pieces all alike (at the beginning of a game) and not complicated with "checks" and "Check-mate" and "stalemate", became known as "the game of draughts", although strictly Speaking Chess and nine men's morris were also games of draughts.

### **19 November 1911**

Now as to the origin of the name Checkers. The word "check" had come into the English language from the game of Chess, in the twelfth century, from the cry of Check-or warning to the king-which had Come from ach shah! "danger to the Shah" or king (Arabic). The word soon became used in the sense of stopping something- such as to Check an advance of the enemy- and the "men", which were often small pebbles or stones, used in merrils and afterwards in draughts, were often called

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

"Checkers". Small stones are still called Checkers" in parts of rural England. I think it probable the name "Checkers" for the game grew from this, more than from the fact that the board was Checkered. I thought of writing now an explanation of the origin of the word "Checkered", or "Chequered", but I have on hand a Cutting from the Yorkshire Post: a short article which I Contributed some months ago, in reply to a query as to what may have been the origin of "the Chequers", as a public house sign, and had it any connection with draughts? This little article may be of some interest, although much of it will be, in substance, a repetition of portions of what has already appeared in the Pittsburg Leader, but it may be fresh to some readers of the present issue, and in any case a repetition helps to impress the facts on the memory. As to public house signs, hanging over the pavement or fixed over the entrance, I imagine there are few, if any, in America, but they are still rather common in England and were formerly much more so.

### "THE CHEQUERS"

The word originally referred to the game of chess -then a new game in England- and was derived from the warning cry of "Check!" used in playing the game. The word "check" was the European rendering of "ach shah!": Arabic warning of danger to the king. From the use of this word in the game the chessboard, and sometimes the game itself, was in England called "the chequer". Chess became fashionable in this country and others between 1100 and 1500 -more especially about 1250-1350- and one result was the use of the chessboard in heraldry, like the "red lion", the "blue boar", and, among other devices, the chess Rook, and afterwards the "elephant and castle". From this came the sign of "The Chequers", and from the chess board came the words "checkered", or "chequed", meaning a pattern of squares like unto a chessboard, or a "chequer", and from this new name for such a pattern of squares came the word "exchequer", and the more modern word "cheque".

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

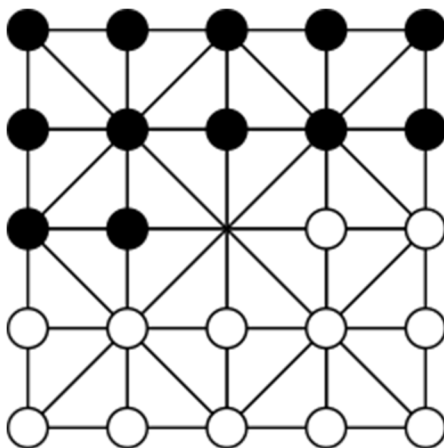


**Exchequer of Ireland**

The latter is a draft on the exchequer, and the exchequer is so named because the king's money-counting table had a cloth with squares on it like "the chequer" of the chess players. For more than a century after the introduction of the game of chess into England the game of draughts was unknown. (Chess came in with the Normans in 1066, if not from Normandy a little earlier.) The oldest reference in English literature to the game of draughts was written in or about 1380, and the next in 1400. The game was then well known, and appears to have been played just as now, though less scientifically. But it was not known to Saxon and Norman England, nor was it known in Spain (where it is believed to have originated) much before 1300.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

There were games of the nature of draughts -such as merrels, which is still played in rural districts- and of the fox and geese kind, and backgammon, which is very ancient, and was formerly called "tables". But the game of draughts as now known in Europe and America was invented or evolved by experimenting on the chess-board with an old Arabic form of merrels called "al-kirk", and by the Spaniards "alquerque".



### Alquerque-12 game

This game had long been played on a board of lines, not squares. There were 12 men on each side, and no "kings"<sup>26</sup>. The board had no "single corner". The men moved along the lines, from one point of intersection to another, either diagonally, as now, or straight forward, or backward, or sideways: any direction allowed by the lines available. Captures were made as now. In a sense the men were all "kings" from the commencement. When the game was transferred to the chessboard, about 1250 probably, the diagonal moves only were retained in Western Europe, and in Turkey the reverse: hence modern "Turkish

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<sup>26</sup> Also Branch is of the opinion that the alquerque-12 game did not have kings (damas). Consequently there was no promotion in the game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

draughts". This was probably because in the west the chessboards were coloured black and white, or otherwise in two colours, while in the east most of the boards had the squares all of the same colour. The men were not allowed to move backwards till after promotion, an idea suggested by the chess pawn, and improving the game, as did also, accidentally, the "single corner" provided by the 64-square chessboard. I send a sketch of the al-kirk board, with the men set for play. There were other forms of the game with fewer men, and these games were known in England as merrels, or morris games. Yet with all this it is true, in a sense, that draughts is much older than chess. The ancient Egyptians had a game of a draughts-like nature, and the Romans a better one later. These were played on boards of squares, but no evidence has been found of a 64-square board, except in India, before chess was invented, for a kind of backgammon game. (This board was utilized, somewhere about 300 or 400 A.D., by the inventor or inventors of chess). The moves and captures in these ancient forms of draughts were different from those of modern draughts, but the main idea was the same: the win by capturing everything, or "blocking". But the games were not draughts as now understood by draughts-players. They became extinct centuries ago -about the time of the break-up of the Roman Empire- being superseded by games of chance, and games of merrels kind, such as alquerque<sup>27</sup>. The Spaniards continued, for a time, the name of "alquerque" for alquerque on the chess board. Afterward the game became known as the game of the dames, or ladies, because the men" were called "dames" (damas), and so in France, and in the oldest English reference to the game. Hence the Scotch word "dambrod": dame-board. The name "draughts" first appears in 1400. It means simply "moves". The American word "checkers" now refers to draughts only, but originally or

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<sup>27</sup> With the term alquerque, one should precisely specify the exact alquerque type. As already specified there existed alquerque-3 and alquerque-9 in the Roman time, but the alquerque-12 originated in Spain, thereafter.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

sometimes, meant either of the games played on the checkered board. Older terms, used in England before draughts was known, included "checkere", and "eschekkere".



**Checkers Inn**

It has been surmised that the sign of a chessboard at an inn meant that chess and draughts could be played within. It may have been so, although I rather doubt if that was the main idea. But chess was, long ago, much more frequently played in inns and taverns than it is now, and this would probably apply to draughts also.

I would now add that among the Celtic and Scandinavian nations the games of "fithcheal" and "hnef-tafl" continued a long time after the break-up of the Roman Empire, but there is no evidence of their existence after 1100 or so, or of their existence at any time among the Latin nations. They were forms of draughts, of which I should like to know more, but there is good reason to believe that modern draughts had no direct connection with them. It is not known how many squares their boards had, but there are references from which it is gathered that the moves and way of capturing were different from "draughts". Regarding the identification of modern checkers

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

with the old "alquerque with 12" be it remembered that the following important rules cover both games:

First: twelve men aside.

Second: the same mode of capture.

Third: the compulsory take.

Fourth: the "huff"

And the moves of the men are very similar and only one step at a time, when not capturing.

I have nearly done with references to chess and to alquerque. What I have left to say will chiefly deal with draughts of from the sixteenth century to our own time, though as to quite modern draughts -its famous players and its recent literature and events- there are many better qualified to write than myself.

### **26 November 1911**

I think I omitted mention of the fact that when the game began to be played on chess-boards in Spain, or as soon as the new promotion rule was adopted, whereby the pieces reaching the farther side of the board were given additional power, these promoted pieces were called Queens, and not Kings, as with us. This, no doubt, because the "move" of the new piece was exactly the same (when not making a capture) as that of a chess queen at that period: one square, diagonally, only, in any direction. Reflecting on this I conclude -it is at least probable- that the game was called "Damas" (dames, or ladies) because the more powerful and important of its pieces were called "Queens". And, by the way, there were very frequently more Queens on the board toward the end of a game of chess than there ever are now. The chess Queen was a weak piece, compared with the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

others except the (old) Bishops and Pawns, and so a game was not lost, as is the case now when the original Queen often was taken, nor was it often won in the ending by merely having one Queen to the good. It often happened that each player had several Queens before the end of the game, made by Pawn promotion, and there are among the ancient problems some showing six Queens of one colour. A draughts end game with six or eight "Queens" on the board would seem like a chess game with most of the pieces left in the game as Queens. So it was in France, but for some reason the promoted pieces were in England called "Kings", perhaps not at first. Very likely the original pieces-12 each side-were called "men" and it was thought absurd to turn a man into a Queen. I fancy that some checker players may be rather disappointed to learn, or to be told by me -which is no quite the same thing, perhaps- first, that there was no direct connection between the ancient games of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and modern draughts, and seemingly that the origin of modern draughts was so much mixed up with chess, and the chessboard used for it. But the game from which our game was born, somewhere about 1250-1290, among the Arabs or the Moors or the Spaniards, was just as much "draughts" as those games of Egypt, Greece and Rome, although played on a board of intersecting lines instead of one of squares; and the game was old in the 13th century, very likely as old as chess. As to the chessboard, we use it, but our game does not require it, and could have had its own special board from the first, if the players had thought of it and devised it. As I have pointed out, and as many knew before, checkers can be played and is played on a board of intersecting lines; and also on a board of 32 squares or diamonds rather, invented by a noted French draughts player, M. Lallement. Our game is quite independent of the chessboard, if we choose to make it so. What it comes to is that the game of checkers is, including its more elementary form, much older than the board we play it on, so far as draughts is concerned. The board, in an unchequered state, is older than chess, as it was used for a dice game in India before

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

chess was invented. Both chess players and checker players have taken a board that belonged to somebody else!



### The game Petteia of Homer

That ancient Greek game mentioned and referred to by Homer (in a line wrongly translated by Pope as “chess”) was played generally with small pebbles, on a board of squares, or partly so, but there was a “sacred way” affecting the condition and powers of pieces getting to it.

So it was not our game of checkers, and had it been there would have been evidence of its continuity, and of its spread across Europe, to Spain, etc., and the game or a modification of it would have appeared in King Alfonso's book of games in 1283. This applies also to the other forms of ancient draughts -games of a draughts-like nature- that had died out before that book was compiled. The “Alfonso MS” is in fact a strong half of the evidence supporting the theory that our checkers was born of alquerque or merrils with 12 men a side, and that each of the other draughts games of antiquity was a more or less distant relative but not the mother.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



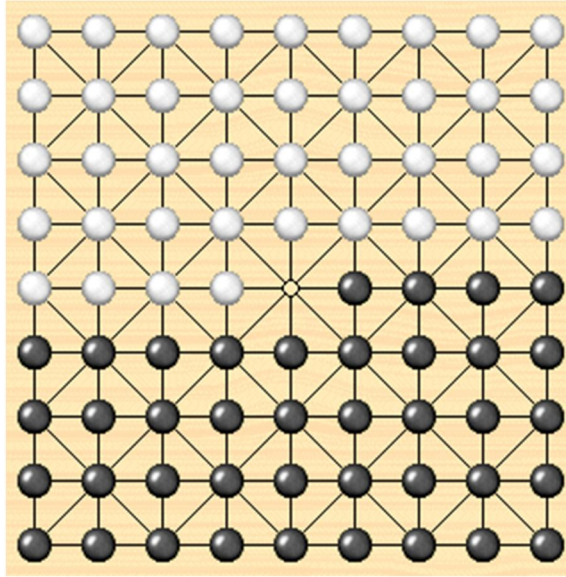
### The Dhamed (Zamma) game in Mauritania<sup>28</sup>

I was the first to put forth this theory in English print -four or five years ago- but its correctness had been thought probable before, notably by Señor Brunet y Bellet and, in the course of his chess historical researches, by Mr. H.J.R. Murray; it is further strength -ened by the discovery that the Philippine draughts players play our game -or the Spanish form of it- on a board of lines, and have long done so.

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<sup>28</sup> *Zamma* (*Damma*, *Srand*, *Dhamet*) is played on a quadruple Alquerque pattern. This game is called *Srand* (or *Dhamet*) in Mauritania, where it is the national game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**The quadruple Alquerque game, Zamma**

They got the game from the Spaniards centuries ago and very likely the board too, a board used in Spain in addition to, or rather by, some people, instead of the chessboard. Especially, I should say, among soldiers and sailors, peasants and children, it being easier to make than the chequered board of sixty-four squares, particularly when, as was sometimes the case in old Spain and is now in the Philippines, the lines of the board are drawn on the ground outdoors, or on a wooden floor. Checkers can be played on a board of lines like alquerque. It is a form of alquerque, changed from the more ancient variety by reason of having to make them run on lines of the same coloured squares. This provided the difference between single and double corner. To put it another way, the old alquerque, as described in the Alfonso MS, was our game of draughts in an early stage, just as the chess of ancient days was the present game of chess in an early stage. Chess has not changed its board (beyond colouring half the squares, at first merely for ornamental purposes) but

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

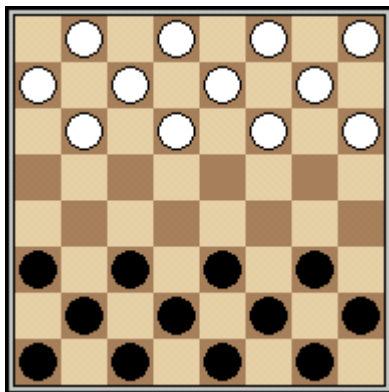
there have been great changes in the power of the pieces, and changes in the rules of the game. For a modern chess player to play the old style game he would have to learn and master practically a new game. The draughts changes include a change of board, a rather different arrangement of the men to start a game, and in other respects slighter changes than have been made in chess.

### **3 December 1911**

Even so, our game has a very respectable antiquity -six hundred years or nearly- under its present rules, and more than a thousand if we include the ancient and simpler Arabic form. Chess is about sixteen centuries of age altogether, but not so old as that in any form now played, and the modern European form (which of course is also the American) has not existed for so much as 450 years. Nor have the Indian, Persian or Arabic, in their present forms, they are less than three hundred years old,

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

being practically the modern European game with differences. The Chinese, Burmese and Japanese games of chess are much older and are very different from our game. There is no positive proof that the game of draughts as introduced into England about 1300 or soon after was played in exactly the same way as it is now, but I think it was, excepting as to the colour of the squares played on. They were generally or always the white, until a much later time. The custom of playing on the black began in Scotland and as the Scots have long had the reputation of being the best draughts players their rules were printed in several of the early nineteenth century draughts books.

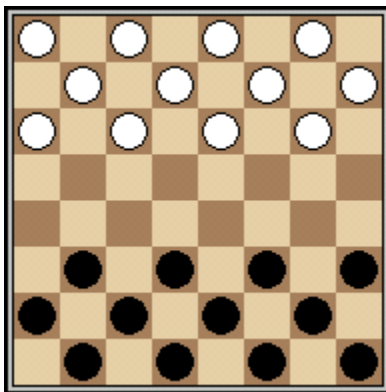


**English draughts game**

The black squares are nearly always used in England now, and I presume in America. But of course it doesn't make an atom of difference to the game so long as each player has a double corner at his right hand. Nor does it make any difference to the game in principle, though it would seem to in practice, to reverse the board's position. It seems probable that our game, except as to trifling matter of the colour of the squares played upon, is the same as played in Spain six hundred years ago, but possibly with the difference of the single corner being then, as now in Spain, placed at the right hand.



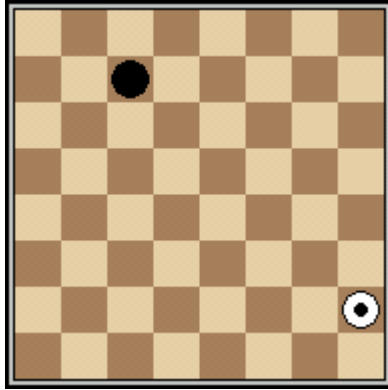
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**The Spanish draughts game**

Otherwise the only difference between Spanish and Anglo-American draughts is that, first, a King (or Queen in Spain) can capture any number of pieces of the opposite player's if they are standing on the diagonal on which he himself stands. The number of intervening vacant squares does not matter. Thus a White may be on 8, 15 and 22, and a Black King on 29. The Black King can take the lot at once and alight on 4 without halting. Second, when a player has a choice of capturing moves he must move the piece that can take the greatest number of pieces, and he must take the greatest number possible. These rules would often make the game run differently from ours, but not until a King was made. Another difference, but a matter of custom and not of rules, is that the Spaniards frequently play with eleven men and a King, or ten men and two Kings, on each side; sometimes on one side only. It appears probably that these differences from our game, especially the increased capturing power of a King -with a chess bishop-like move sometimes-came about in Spain after the English had learned the game as they know it now, but before 1500. Here is an illustration of the Spanish draughts-Queen's chess-Bishop-like move, made only in effecting a capture. White Queen on 5; Black man on 27; White to move. The Queen takes the man and stops on 32.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



It is long-range firing, like that given to the hitherto weaker Queens and Bishops in chess about 1470-1500. I think it a decided improvement in chess, but do not feel able to give an opinion as to its being a change for the better in draughts. To do so would require practice with Spanish experts. But the change is not so great as in chess, as the extended move is only allowed when a capture can be made. Hardly anything is known now of our game of draughts in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, beyond these facts. The game was much played either as it is now or with slight differences, all over Western and Central Europe; in Spain it was at first called "alquerque" and "marro de punta" - "marro" meaning "merrils"- and this helps to connect modern draughts with the Moorish "alquerque" played on the board of lines instead of squares, and then "Damas", by which name it became known in France and England; then the English called it "draughts", for a reason which I have explained. The earliest allusions to the game in any literature still in existence are English, of about 1380 and 1400. The first call the game damas, the second draughts. In the British Museum there is a drawing, perhaps a little older than 1380, showing a lady and a youth playing the game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Lady and a young man playing at draughts<sup>29</sup>  
(British Museum)**

I know of no literary reference to the game during the next century, the fifteenth, but it is certain that it was much played, and there is a Spanish tradition that at that period the best players came from Seville<sup>30</sup>. The sixteenth century produced the first printed books on draughts, all Spanish, and there is a 16th century manuscript preserved at Perugia, Italy, chiefly filled with chess problems, which has one diagram of "Ludus dominarum", our draughts, with the men set for play, Black above White below, and the double corner to the players' right hands. This is probably the oldest draughts diagram in existence, as, though the earlier Spanish books may have had one or more, those books are lost.

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<sup>29</sup> I repeat again the drawing of page 35. However, this picture has nothing to do with draughts.

<sup>30</sup> So far, I did not see any documentary proof on that.

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

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**Ludus dominarum D.  
Manuscript of Perugia<sup>31</sup>, (1502)**

## 17 December 1911

Writing on one side of the Atlantic matter to be printed on the other, I do not see the “proofs”, and so cannot make any corrections, of spelling, etc., or add anything that might come to mind in proof-reading as I do not see the articles in the Leader until several weeks after I have entrusted them to King George’s man. I have at the time of writing this one, seen but the first four. In the three of these that mention the word “alquerque” - the Spanish name for the mother of modern checkers- the word

<sup>31</sup> We repeat that Garzón stipulated the manuscript to be of the year 1502. Cf.: Garzón, José Antonio (2006), “The Return of Francesch Vicent. The History of the Birth and Expansion of Modern Chess”; translated by Manuel Pérez Carballo. (Foreword Anatoli Karpov). Generalitat Valenciana, Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esport: Fundació Jaume II el Just, Valencia. ISBN 84-482-4194-0.

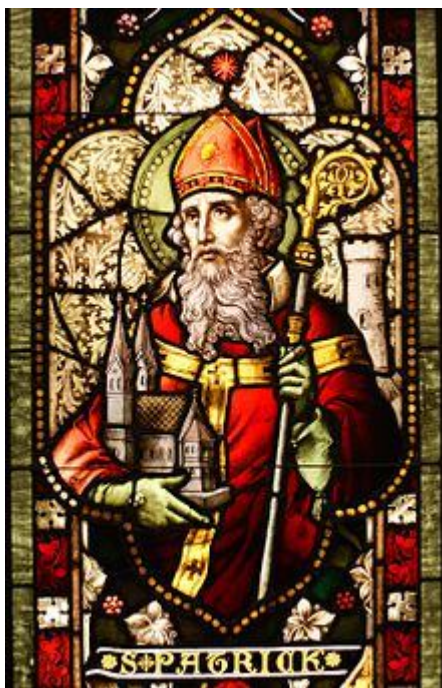
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

is incorrectly spelled. It should be alquerque”, another spelling of the Arabic “al-kirk”, and pronounced just the same. (Two q’s“ and no “g” and no ”v”). But my writing being somewhat peculiar, the name “alquerque” was allowed to stand as the printer gave. In the last paragraph of the fourth chapter there were six words missing; the concluding lines should read: “Draughts games in principle are much older than chess, though chess is older than the game of draughts as played now<sup>32</sup>. But our game of draughts as now played is older than chess as played now.” In the fifth instalment the word “American“ was, of course, a misprint; it should have been “ancient”, and the line at end, “Such a country could not have been Italy, Spain or France”, should have been “Such a country could only have been Italy, Spain or France.” [All corrected in this transcription.] I have alluded to “Fithcheal” or “Fidchell”, a game of a draughts-like nature, played by the ancient Irish, and to “Hneftafl”, a Scandinavian game (played to some extent in England before and probably after the Norman conquest). Concerning these and some other matters connected with our present subject, I have just received an interesting letter from Mr. H.]R. Murray, of Cambridge, England. I quote the greater portion of it here: “We know very little about Fidchell. Here is an entry in Cormac’s old Irish glossary: ‘The Fidchell is four- cornered, its squares are right-angled, and black and white men are on it. And it is different people that in turn win the game.’ An old Irish text, but not of the oldest, dealing with the life of St. Patrick, but bringing in Ossian and other heroes of a prior age, refers to the game.

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<sup>32</sup> Apparently Branch is referring to precursors of the game of draughts. Alquerque-12 is a precursor of draughts, but cannot be called draughts such as we knew it in the XVI century. The invention of the draughts game had to do with a mixture of alquerque-12 and the chess board.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



St. Patrick (Wikipedia)

Cailte is to play Fidchell with the King of Connaght, but three men of the latter's set are missing. Cailte goes to a fair cairn where he had once seen board and men and brings three silver and three gold men. He tells the King that there were thrice 50 men of silver and thrice 50 men of gold, which he had left in the cairn, and the board. -I don't attach importance to the exact numbers: Irish texts generally seem to exaggerate. But it supports other passages in making no reference to any differentiation of piece. Fidchell is the same word as the Welsh gwyddbwyll, but none of the Welsh references give much help. I am inclined to think that we should find -if we had complete information- that fidchell was practically the same as the ludus latruncolorum; but it would take too long to give all the minute points which seem to me to point this conclusion." (I have

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

described the Roman game -ludus latrunculorum- as well as imperfect knowledge allows. It was a game of considerable skill, and it was not chess. It is clear that it was not the same as modern checkers, as the pieces could, if the board had been chequered in two columns, have moved from one colour to the other, and there is no evidence of the "take" having been compulsory, or of captures having been made by leaping one piece over another. The evidence in fact is against this. There is no evidence of the board having 64 squares only, and I think there were more, and more than 12 men a side).

Mr. Murray continues -and this knocks "Hnef-tafl" out of court as a draughts game- Hnefatafl was the same as the Welsh 'Tawlbwrdd'. Both games were played between sides, the one with a King (hnefa) and eight men; the other with 16 men. The game was a kind of fox and geese, in that the 16 men attacked the hnefa, and the eight defended him. Boards have, I learned recently, been discovered in sepulchral mounds in Denmark and Sweden, and I have discovered the exact nature of hnefatafl, but keep it back for my book. When that comes out you will see that there is not the remotest likeness to draughts: the aim, method of move, and method of capture are utterly different. The game was still played in 1700. I do not know yet about the alleged discovery of a Roman 'draughts-board' at the excavations in Northumberland. Scratching of boards have, of course, been found in Rome and Pompeii, and a number of boards exist in Italian museums. I am told by an authority that all these boards are evidently for the Duodecim scripta, an early form of backgammon. Most of the boards found scratched on the Forum pavement at Rome are for merrils (the three men's morris variety)" I did not in the first or second articles allude to the more popular Roman game here referred to, the "Duodecim scripta", because it was a dice game, and not a draughts game in the sense of being a game of "moves" directed by skill only. The superior game, "Latrunculorum", was evidently less popular with the masses: it was too scientific for them.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Initial position of Fidchell<sup>33</sup>**

### 24 December 1911

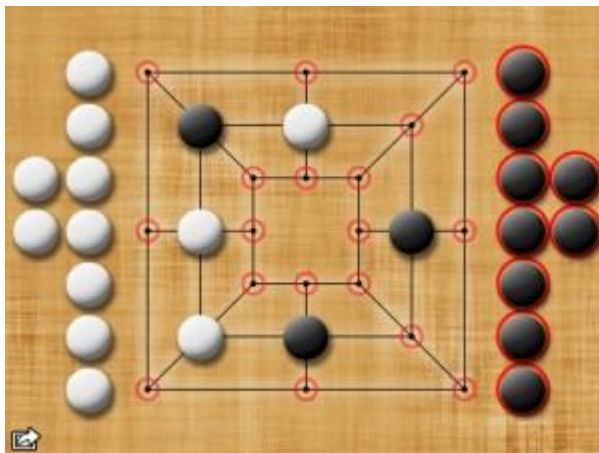
As the games of the nature of draughts, or which have been by some writers conjectured to be draughts, played in or near Europe before the fourteenth century A.D. have all been proved different -in all but one case very different- from the games we call draughts or checkers, it follows that our game must have originated in or shortly before the beginning of that century, during which it became fairly popular in Western Europe. The then old game, which was more like modern draughts, was "alquerque with 12 men a side", or, as the English may have called it, "12 men's morris".

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<sup>33</sup> Courtesy of: <http://dreoilin.wordpress.com/2010/01/19/fidchell/>



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**12 men's morris<sup>34</sup>**

But it was played chiefly in Spain and Marocco and among the Arabs. (The 9 men's was much played in England). This "alquerque with 12" was the mother of modern draughts; that is practically certain, from, first, the similarity of the two games, apart from the appearance of the boards used for them; second, the non-existence of our game much earlier than 1300; and, third, some philological evidence which has but lately come to light. There is also the striking fact of the game of "damas", taken long ago by the Spaniards to the Philippine islands, being played on a board of lines. As to the great similarity (compared with any other of the ancient games) of alquerque, or al-kirk, to modern checkers, be it noted that that ancient game was the only one existing before the fourteenth century, which can be proved to have had these rules: Twelve men a side. The compulsory

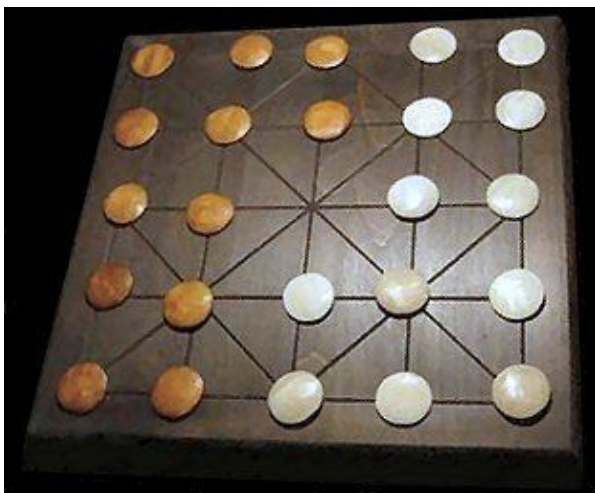
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<sup>34</sup> Courtesy of: <http://www.quantumclockwork.net/morris/>

This game is often confused with the Alquerque-12 game because it also has 12 pieces. However, it has nothing to do with Alquerque-12.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

capture. The "huff" for not taking. And capturing by leaping one piece over another.



### 12 men's morris<sup>35</sup>

It may be asked "What about Asia and the far east? Could our game have come there, other than in the Arabic form as described?" The reply must be "no". The far east had its ancient and scientific game, "Wei-chi" or "Go", played on a board of lines, and more of the nature of draughts than of chess.

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<sup>35</sup> Courtesy of <http://almogavares.foros.ws/t1804/juegos-medievales/>  
It is clear that the term alquerque is not enough to represent a game. Even the 12 men's morris can cause confusion. Therefore, the game should be properly indicated.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

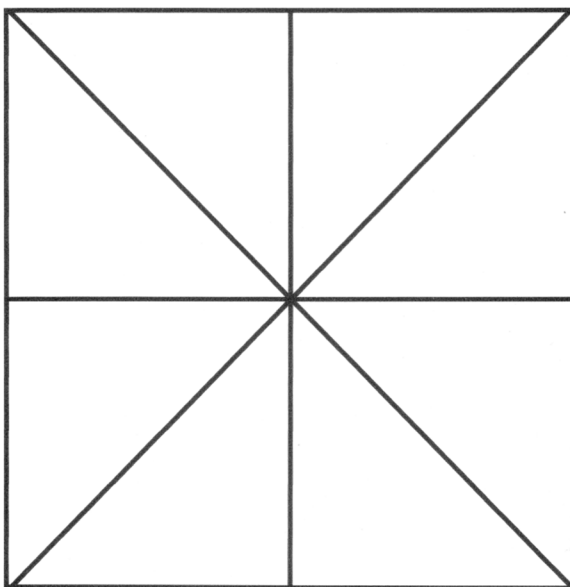


**The boardgame "Go" (wikipedia)**

But it was, and is, very different indeed from draughts whether ancient or modern. For one thing, the pieces (all alike, and more than a hundred on each side) never move at all! The game begins with an empty board (of 361 points, though the game can be played on the squares made by the intersecting lines) and one small man, or counter, is played on the board at each turn to play. But he never moves again. So in a history of checkers we need say nothing more of "Go", although it is the favourite indoor game of the Japanese. They play a kind of chess also, but only a few know anything about our draughts. The same applies to China. After about 200 or 300 A.D. India had chess, which spread east and greatly changed there, and west with little change till Europeans changed it much later. And there were various forms of backgammon (board games with the moves, or positions of the men, decided by the throw of dice) and there were several games of the merrils kind, as in Europe and nearly all over the world, games played on lines and points. The 12-

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

men-a-side merrils (or alquerque) came into Europe from the east, but has not been traced farther than Arabia. It evidently grew from the primitive game played with very few "men" on a board like this:

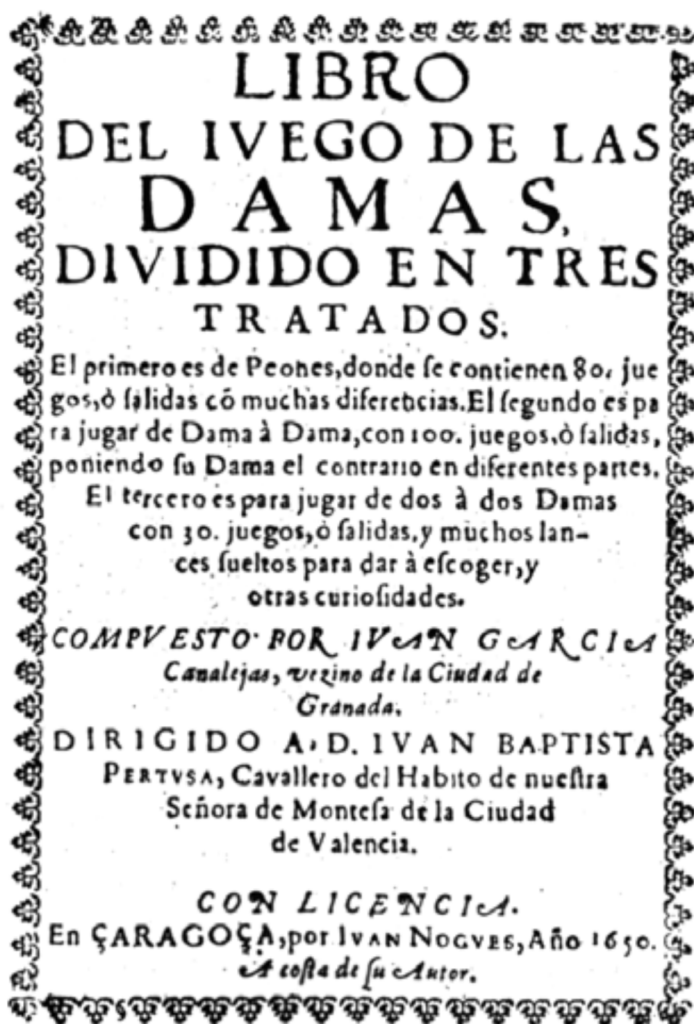


The men were moved along lines from one point or corner to another, and captured by jumping over a man of the opposite colour. The "alquerque-with-12" board is made by placing for such boards or designs as the above together in one square. This game, the mother of checkers, is still played a little in Spain and among the Moors and Arabs. As previously explained, our checkers sprung from this game, in or near Spain, about 1200 or, as I think, a little earlier. I am repeating this partly for the benefit of any readers who have not seen the first few chapters of this "History" - the first history of checkers in print- and partly because of a letter I lately received from Mr. T.W. Roper, of Norwich, England, and a checker editor of long standing. He is, from what he has read in these articles and otherwise, inclined to

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

think our game did originate in the way I have described. But he points out a possible objection that may be raised. Several printed draughts books, contain some analysis, and much of it still thought sound, from the pen of Canalejas, another Spaniard, in 1650 (not 1610, as printed by mistake in some modern books). Was there sufficient time for this amount of scientific analysis to be worked out and booked between 1300 and for Canalejas, 1650, and 1547 for Torquemada, the earliest author of a printed draughts book? This earliest book has long been lost, so we don't know what analysis it had, but it is known that Canalejas had more and was more advanced in the science of the game. His book, of 144 pages, is very rare, and I have not seen a copy. It had larger type than a modern book, and there would not be so much analysis as could be got in a modern book of 144 pages. Still there was a good deal. Well, I think there was ample time for the discovery and booking of all that was known by Canalejas and the earlier writers: more than two centuries between 1300 and the first printed book, and three and a half for Canalejas. It would not require many generations of keen players and students of the game to work out a great deal of analysis, and to discover that certain moves or lines of play were strong and others weak, and that every good move could be met by another. There may have been some stock openings and some amount of booked or remembered analysis even in the simpler old alquerque game; this would have been of no use for the new game, but it would tend to induce some early analysis of the game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



The book of Juan García Canalejas, 1650

But whether this was so or not it would not be long before the new game, once it had become fairly popular, began to be studied and analyzed by the best players. Knowledge of the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

game would be always increasing, and there was then, of course, plenty of scope for fresh discoveries and more extended analysis. A very great deal could be done in three centuries, as with the new chess after 1470-1500. The changes made in that game destroyed all the old openings and analysis and a fresh start had to be made for those who took to the new game. Yet before 1650 the new, and, by that time, almost universal, chess in Europe had a great quantity of analysis attached to it, as much as draughts had quite. So I hold that three centuries allowed plenty of time for the evolution of all that was known to Canalejas<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> The earliest books in Spain were as follows:

1547 ANTONIO DE TORQUEMADA

El ingenio, ò juego de Marro, de punta, ò Damas. Valencia. (Lost book?).

(1591 PEDRO RUIZ MONTERO

Libro del Juego de las Damas, vulgarmente nombrado el marro, Valencia.

1595? ALONSO GUERRA

Libro para jugar a las damas, compuesto por el Licenciado Alonso Guerra, natural de la Villa de Ossuna, en el Andaluzia. (written c. 1595), Reduzido assimismo en este mesmo estilo por el dicho Ldo Don Diego de Argomedo. En este año de 1658.

1597 LORENZO VALLS

Libro del Juego de las Damas, por otro nombre el Marro de Punta, Valencia.

1635 JUAN DE TIMONEDA

Libro llamado Ingenio, el qual trata del Juego del Marro de punta", hecho por Juan de Timoneda, Dedicado al Mvy magnifico Señor don Ynnigo de Losca Capitan en las Galeras de España. Al qual se han annadido ocho trechas de mucha primor, por Antonio Miron y del Castillo, Tolosa.

1650 JUAN GARCÍA CANALEJAS

Libro del Juego de las Damas, Zaragoza, 144 pages.

1684 JOSEPH CARLOS GARCEZ

Libro nuevo, Juego de damas - Madrid, 244 pages.

1718 PABLO CECINA RICA Y FERGEL

Medula eutropelia, calculatoria, que enseña a jugar a las Damas, con Espada y Broquel. Madrid, casa de Blas Villa Nueva. 214 pages.

1740? JOSÉ PADRINO

Médula eutropelia, calculatoria, que enseña a jugar a las Damas, con Espada y Broquel, Sevilla, 233 pages.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**31 December 1911**

There can be no doubt that the analysis of the game of draughts began, in a small way, about 1300, and continued with constantly increasing knowledge of the depths of the game -chiefly in Spain, and probably more in France and Italy than in Britain- right on to the eighteenth century, when the English players and writers, Payne, Painter and Sturges<sup>37</sup>, between them put English draughts on as high a level scientifically as was any other. They may, or Sturges especially, have obtained some aid from Scottish players whose names are lost, their work never having been printed as such. The game was much played in Scotland in and before the eighteenth century, and I have no doubt that it was better played than in England, on the average, and in proportion to population. The first printed draughts books were Spanish, like the first printed practical chess books. ("Caxton's Game and Play of the Chesse" concerned only the old form of the game, soon to become obsolete, and even so it was more of a bundle of moralities and stories than a chess work). The name of the author of the first printed draughts book is known: Torquemada, a Spanish player of some renown. He produced it at Valencia in 1547. Sad to say no copy of this work is known to exist, and we only know of the book from references to it in later ones. The same applies to the first edition of the next published work, also at Valencia, in 1591. One copy, perhaps the only one existing, of a second edition of this work, is preserved at Berlin; it was printed in 1597. The next Spanish books were much more advanced, and had besides many games

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<sup>37</sup> The earliest books in Great Britain were as follows:

1756 WILLIAM PAYNE

An introduction to the game of Draughts, containing fifty select games, together with many critical situations for Drawn games, won games, and fine strokes. The whole designed for the instruction of young players, in this innocent and delightful amusement, London.

1787 WILLIAM PAINTER

A companion for the draught-player, London 1787.

1800 JOSHUA STURGES

Guide to the game of draughts, London.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The fourth tractate and the last of the progression and  
draughtes of the forsayd playe of the chesse

The first chapter of the fourth tractate of the chesse booke  
in generall how it is maad capitulo primo

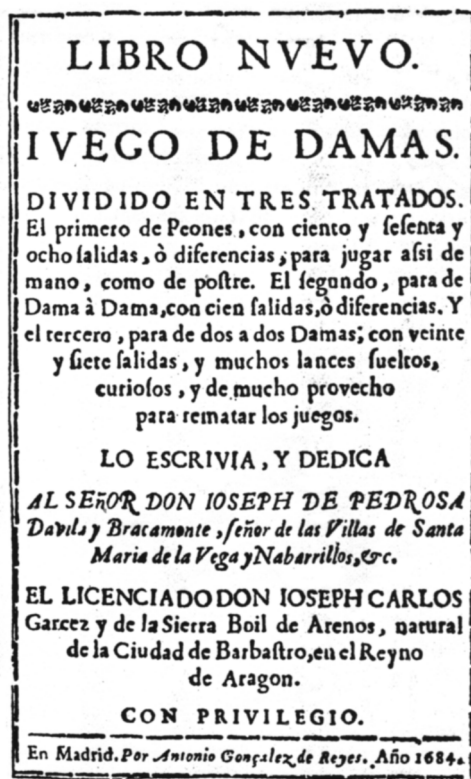


¶ We haue deuyfed aboue the thynges that apperteyne  
vnto the formes of the chesse men and of their offi-  
ces. that is to wete as wel of noble men as of the comyn  
peple / Than hit apperteyneth that we sholdy deuyse shortly  
how they yssue and goon out of the places wher they be  
sette / And first we oughte to speke of the forme and of  
the facion of the cheques after that hit representeth and

The chessbook of Caxton

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

and some positions and a considerable amount of corrections of previously published play. These two books were by Juan Garcia Canalejas, 1650 (Saragossa) and Joseph Carlos Garcez, 1684 (Madrid).

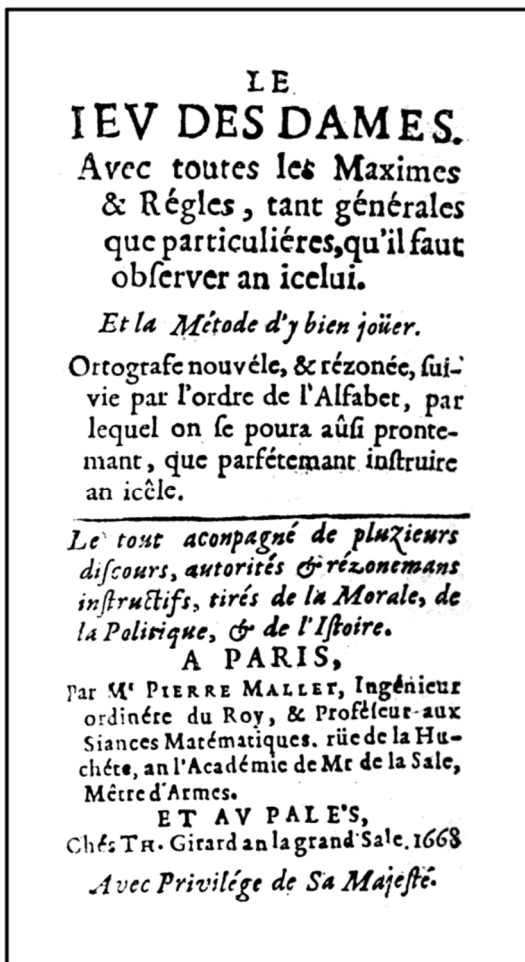


The draughts book of Josef Carlos Garcez

Canalejas may be considered the father of modern scientific draughts to about the same extent as Ruy Lopez -a Spanish priest and noted chess player of a century earlier- was of chess. But in both cases the idea can be exaggerated: and as to draughts it should be remembered that as soon as a man becomes a king in Spanish draughts the game is different to the

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

Anglo-American, and consequently the Spanish analysis after that point is of no use to American-British players.



The French draughts book of Pierre Mallet

But of the opening play Canalejas knew a good deal that is in our modern books, though of course under different names for

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

the openings. He is credited with the first discovery of the following trap in What we call the "Bristol Cross". 11-16, 23-18, 16-20, 24-19, 8-11, 19-15, 10-19, 18-14, 9-18, 22-8, 4-11, 27-24, 20-27, 31-8; White wins. There were later Spanish draughts books than those mentioned, but since the seventeenth century the output in the English language has been far greater. The earliest French book was by Pierre Mallet, a professor of mathematics in Paris; this was printed in 1668. It is now very scarce, but the best-known collectors have got it<sup>38</sup>. There have been very few French works on the game, as it was in France soon superseded after Mallet's time by Polish draughts, or to a large extent. At an earlier period the ordinary game had been popular in France and this, I think, helped to make it popular in Scotland, before the time of the Protestant Reformation. England and Scotland were separate nations under different crowns, and, while England and France were always more or less hostile Scotland and France were friendly and sometimes in alliance. French ships and sometimes French troops visited Scotland, and a good many Scots entered the French service. Mary Queen of Scots lived in France when young, and she played draughts as well as chess. At an earlier time a knowledge of the game must have spread north from England, probably fixing the rules in Scotland as now except as using the black squares. But all the Franco-Scottish intercourse helped to popularize draughts in Scotland. The game suits the national character, and more so than it does the French, in modern times in any rate. I do not think that any kind of draughts is very popular in France nor chess. They prefer dominoes and cards. But of course there are many draughts players chiefly of the Polish variety or extension of the game. Very few Italian draughts books have been printed.

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<sup>38</sup> I bought years ago in Holland an exemplar at a reasonable price. Therefore, I do not believe that this book is a rare one. The earliest books in France were as follows:

1668 MALLET, PIERRE

Le jeu des dames - Avec toutes les maximes et règles, tant générales que particulières, qu'il faut observer an icelui. Et la méthode d'y bien jouer". - Paris.

1727 DIEGO CAVALLERO DEL QUERCETANO

L'Égide de Pallas- "ou théorie et pratique du jeu de dames", Paris.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

One of 1830, by Mancini<sup>39</sup>, is said to be the earliest, but I think this may be a mistake. There have of course been some books in German<sup>40</sup> and other languages, but I know them not. Some years ago I was interested in the reported discovery in Cincinnati of an English draughts book dated 1563, with a picture of two men playing the game and some diagrams. As no such book had been known to exist the alleged discovery caused some excitement. The book, however, proved to be about "The Philosopher's Game", and its diagrams had moons, and stars, and triangles on them. The game was to be played with 48 pieces of various shapes and powers on a board of 128 squares. I found that a copy of the book was in the British Museum library. The game of draughts was introduced into a play, "Arden of Feversham", by an author now unknown, in 1592.

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<sup>39</sup> The earliest books in Italy were as follows:

1800 UNKNOWN AUTHOR

Giuoco così detto della dama spiegato in tutte le sue parti, Milano.

1830 C. MANCINI

Il giuoco della dama all'uso italiano, Firenze.

1832 LORENZO SONZOGNO

Il Maestro di giuochi della Dama all' Italiana e alla Polacca, e degli Scacchi, Milano.

<sup>40</sup> The earliest books in Germany were as follows:

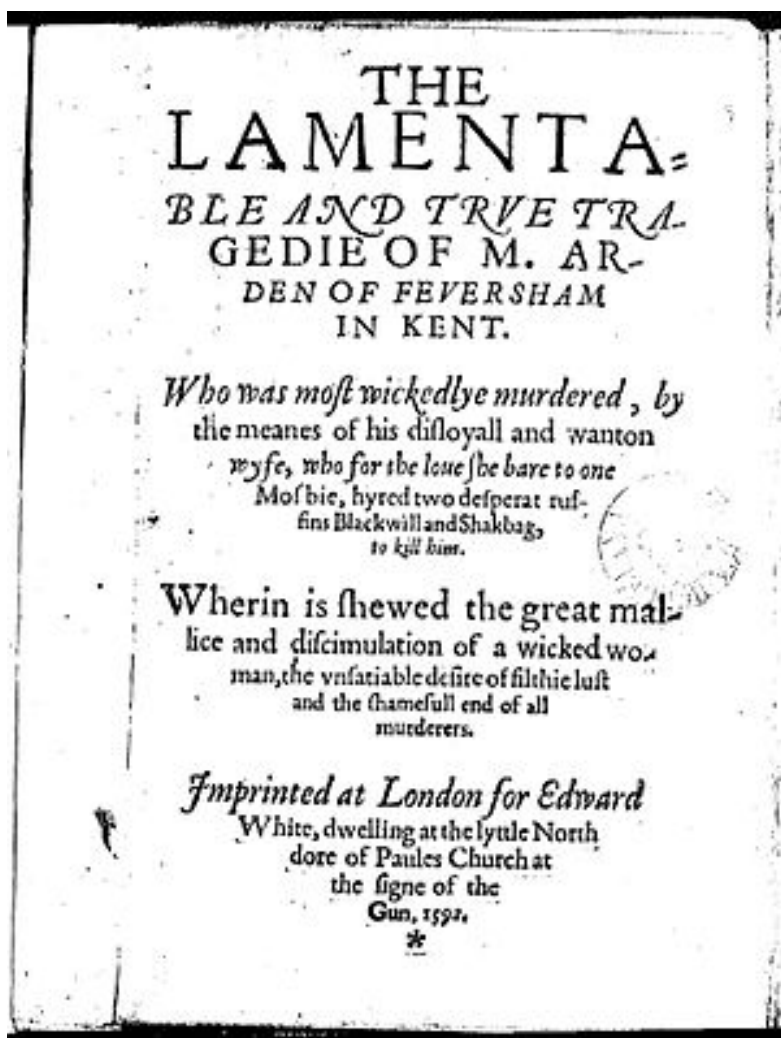
1700 SCHMIDT, JOHANN WOLFGANG.

Unterschiedliche Spiel und Vorstellungen des weitberühmten Damspiels, - denen Liebhabern zu ehren welche schon etwas Wissenschaft davon haben.- Nürnberg (manuscript)

1744 F.T.V.

Das erklärte Damen-spiel,- "oder erster Versuch einer kunst-mässigen und ausführlichen Anweisung zu solchem Spiele um dasselbe niemals zu verlieren". Magdeburg.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



The Arden of Feversham

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

7 January 1912

The oldest English account of the game of draughts was printed in 1688, in a book by one Randle Holme, of Chester, entitled, *Academy of Armory*". Among many things treated of in this work are draughts, and chess, but briefly, and we get no real information. The few remarks help us to know that draughts was widely known and long established in England, but the writer appears to have been no draughts player himself. Here is what he says of the game: Draughts is a play on a chess board, or the back of a pair of tables (which generally have four rows of squares made on it, viz.: four of black and four of white, interchangeably) and are set with the table-men, one party with the white, and the adverse party with the black. The play is, to remove each man cornerwise. If they be not in play well backed or guarded, and that a man may leap over his adversary's man's head to a void square, that man is huffed; that is, he is taken up as a slain man. Single men must go all forward; they cannot go or remove backwards. A king is that man, which hath passed through the board to the further side, and being crowned (that is having a table-man put upon him) is free to walk backwards or forwards as he pleaseth. Thus they move and remove to and again, seeking to huff one another, and him that stands longest without being taken wins the game. So ends Randle Holme, 1688. He uses the term "huff" in a sense that seems strange now, but I think it was usual, or frequent, and not his mistake. The word, "tables", meant back- gammon, or a backgammon board, which was generally or always a folding board and so, and because of the division for two players, was called "a pair of tables". A backgammon man" was a "table-man", and these "men" were used also for the game of draughts, often played on the reverse side of the backgammon board, as also, sometimes was chess. The terms, "tables" and "table-man", were very ancient in 1688, but I know of no later use of them in print. The word, "backgammon", was freely used in the eighteenth century, and the game now has no other name in English. It is little played in comparison with former times, and may, perhaps, be



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

very little-known in America. For the information of such as know nothing about this ancient game -which has had many forms, and was played in Egypt 5,000 years ago or more- I add that the position or value of the "men" are, at each turn to play, decided by the throw of dice. There is some skill in the game, but it is mainly a game of chance. The learned Dr. Thomas Hyde published at Oxford in 1694 his book "'De Ludus Orientalibus"' (of oriental games). It is written in Latin, and deals with the history of chess, draughts and other games from the east, or played in the east, as far as the writer could do so.



**Thomas Hyde**

He says little of draughts, but here is a summary of his draughts section: "Of the names of the game: Draughts and latrunculi are



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

different because the method of capture in the two games is different. English name: 'draughts'; Flemish: 'schuyv'; French: 'dames'; Spanish and Italian: 'damas'; German: 'dam'; Turkish: 'dama ojunu'. The Spaniards have four names of this game, of which one is 'damas', as above. The second is 'alquerque'. The third is 'Castro'<sup>41</sup>, the fourth 'real'. As to the ancient *latrunculi*, neither African nor Asiatic Arabs have any name for it; it is, therefore, doubtful if they know them of old". Hyde briefly describes the mode of play in various countries, and explains the huffing rule. He makes no attempt to get at the origin of checkers. But he must have known that it was a modern game compared with "*ludus latruncularum*". I am informed that *alquerque* -the old original on the board of lines- is still played in Mexico, and to some extent among the Indians of the United States.

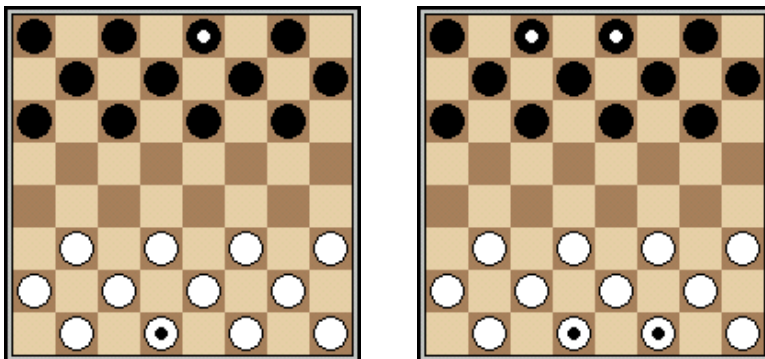
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<sup>41</sup> Every day I believe more and more that the *castro* game was nothing else than the 9-morris game.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

14 January 1912

I find that the name "Dames" lingered on in England later than I thought. A book of 1580 has "Le jeu des Morelles", translated as "The play of Dammes"<sup>42</sup>, and one of 1653 has "There he played at the Dames or draughts".



**Dammes (Damas) in the initial position of the game**

This is 250 years later than the first use of the name Draughts" in any still existing literature. I have no doubt that in Scotland the name Dames"" was general till much later than in England. The board is still often called "the dambrod" there, and the fanciful name of ""Dameh"" for the Goddess of Draughts-answering to "Caissa" for chess-originated, I think, in Scotland. At any rate it is more used by Scotch writers than English. The Scottish name for the board reminds me of a little story. A Scotch lady visiting London and doing a little shopping told the salesman that she wished to see some material of a dambrod pattern. The surprised draper's assistant replied that he could

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<sup>42</sup> In the beginning of the new game of draughts (1495), the Spaniards played the game with two dames in the initial position. This was the reason that the game was called "The play of Dammes" (Spanish: El juego de las damas).

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

show her some pretty broad patterns, "but none so broad as that!" A work that might have been expected to give the main features of the history of draughts is the "Encyclopedia Britannica", latest edition. The ninth edition appeared in 1877, and some supplementary volumes a few years ago. In both there is a description of the game, and the supplementary volume has a good account of the matches between England and Scotland -all quite modern- and of the matches for the world's championship. But great ignorance is shown as to the early history of the game. The writer, in 1877, remarked "Draughts is a game of unknown origin" -which it was, then, to English writers at any rate- and then gives 1668 (Mallet, Paris), as the oldest date for a draughts book. No mention of Spain, or of the fact that the game was well known in England in the fourteenth century. Except for a reference or two to Payne and Sturges, and Mallet, there is no historical information at all. The writer mentions the ancient Roman game, but confuses it with a game played on a board of only 16 squares, and that was a dice game, and therefore a form of backgammon. I mention the Encyclopedia Britannica because I have just been re-reading its checker articles to see if there was anything of use to me in connection with the seventeenth or eighteenth century, and there isn't. Old Strutt, the eighteenth century antiquary, knew very little about draughts, but what he says in his "Sports and Pastimes of the People of England" (published 1801), has a certain interest. He calls English draughts "The French game", to distinguish it from Polish, and he thought it began in France probably about the end of the sixteenth century, 300 years later than it did begin in Spain<sup>43</sup>. He heads his short article "Draughts, French and Polish". Viz.:

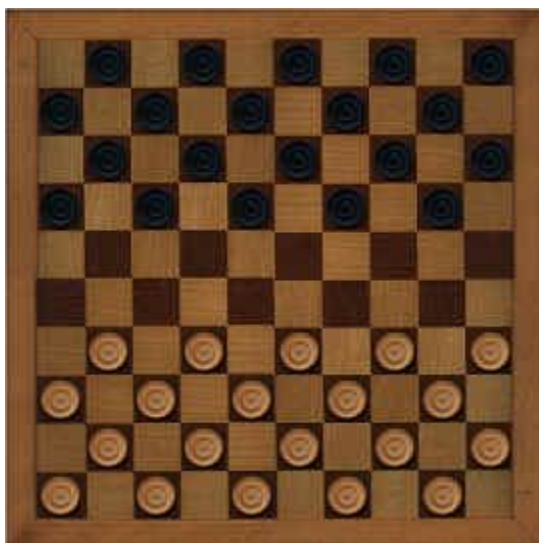
This pastime is well known in the present day, and I believe there are now in London as

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<sup>43</sup> I think this is a perfect vision of the real situation, completely different than that one of the historian Dr. Arie van der Stoep.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

excellent draught players as ever existed. Draughts, no doubt, is a modern invention, and easier to be learnt than chess, because it is not so intricate; for the pieces are of equal value till they become Kings, and can only move one way, that is diagonally; but, like chess, it depends entirely upon skill, and one false move frequently occasions the loss of the game. There are two methods of playing at draughts, the one commonly used in England, denominated the French game, which is played upon a chess board, and the other called the Polish game, because, I presume, the first was invented in France and the latter in Poland<sup>44</sup>. This requires a board with 10 squares in each row, and 20 men, for so the pieces are usually named.



**The universal or international draughts game**

The draughtman is called in French 'dame'. The men in the Polish game can only move forward as they do in the French game, but they have the privilege of taking backward as well as forward; and the King, if not opposed by two men close together, can move from one

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<sup>44</sup> The draughts game with a short king on the chessboard is from French origin, and the Polish game has nothing to do with Poland. The game of the 100 squares is from Dutch origin.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

corner of the board to the other. The Polish game admits of most variety, and is, in my opinion, the best; but it is little known in this country, and rarely played, except by foreigners. We have a recent publication upon the French game of draughts, which fully explains the nature of the pastime, and points out more of the important moves, published by Sturges, who, I am told, is an excellent player."

So ends Strutt, with a reference to a book then hardly a year old: the first edition of "Sturges"

### NOTES

The "Lallement draughts-board", of which I wrote some time back, was designed by a Frenchman of that name and longer ago than I realized when writing. He published a book<sup>45</sup> in 1802, chiefly about a game of his own invention compounded of chess and draughts. In this book, among other diagrams and figures, appears the design of what we call the "Lallement" board, suitable for our game or for "Minor Polish Draughts". I am told that an enlarged edition of this board is used by some players for the major or proper Polish draughts.

I have been supplied with particulars of the first printed checker book in German. It was printed in Nuremberg<sup>46</sup> in 1700. "Dam Spiels" (Draughts game). The first Dutch book<sup>47</sup>, Amsterdam, 1785. The first Russian book<sup>48</sup>, 1827. The first book on "Polish Draughts" was

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<sup>45</sup> LALLEMENT, J.G. (1802). Les quatre jeux de dames, Polonais, Egyptien, Echecs et à trois personnes; ...., Metz, chez l'auteur et chez Behmer, libraire-éditeur, an X, 2 vol. grand in-12 de 382 et 218, ensemble 600 pages.

<sup>46</sup> 1700 SCHMIDT, JOHANN WOLFGANG.  
Unterschiedliche Spiel und Vorstellungen des weitberühmten Damspiels, - denen Liebhabern zu ehren welche schon etwas Wissenschaft davon haben.- Nürnberg (manuscript)

<sup>47</sup> 1785 EPHRAIM VAN EMBDEN.  
Verhandeling over het damspel, Amsterdam.

<sup>48</sup> 1827 PETROFF, A.D.  
Guide to the thorough knowledge of checkers or the ability to win from everyone in the ordinary checkers, St. Petersburg. (Translation of the Russian text).

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

printed at Paris<sup>49</sup> about 1740, only 25 copies! I learn that at this time "Polish draughts" -as the French title called it- was in Poland called French draughts! There is no evidence of the existence of this game before 1700 or a few years later, but I think it must have been played in France in or soon after 1670.

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<sup>49</sup> In an essay on the game of checkers to Polonoise (Essai sur le jeu de dames à la polonoise), published in 1770 (not 1740), a barman named MANOURY, said that the game arrived in Paris around 1725-1730.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

21 January 1912

I have been asked some questions about "Polish Draughts". They have been partly answered in what I have previously written, but I will here explain the game more fully and finish with this branch of "Checkers". Polish Draughts is played chiefly in France, Belgium and Holland, with twenty pieces a side on a board of a hundred squares, and in India on a board of 144 squares, with thirty pieces a side.



**Draughtsboard with 144 squares<sup>50</sup>**

The men move as with us, with the addition that they capture backwards as well as forwards. Upon getting to the crownhead a man becomes a King, unless he has got there by a "Take" and can take one or more other men by moving backwards again, in which case he must take them, and does not become a King till he can reach the "King row" again, in the ordinary way. In this case he rests on the crown-head as with us, not moving

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<sup>50</sup> Courtesy of <http://damierclubdesens.over-blog.fr>

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

backward till another turn to play. A King has the same powers as in Spanish draughts, but with a larger field to exercise. He can therefore take any number of pieces of the opposite colour standing, with intervals between each, on the same diagonal as himself, although the interval may be and often is of more than one square. Apart from taking, the Kings move like chess Bishops. Capturing is compulsory, as in all modern forms of draughts, but unlike our game, there is no choice of pieces to capture: the largest number must be taken. With these exceptions the laws of ordinary checkers apply. Some years ago an international Polish Draughts tournament was held at Marseilles, with a prize fund of 800 francs. The game seems to have no real connection with Poland as it was there called "French Draughts" more than a hundred years ago, and it is not much played in Poland. It may have been invented, as to the large board, by a Frenchman who had lived in Poland, or by a Pole in Paris, sometime in the second half of the seventeenth century. It is not, I think, ancient in India. But I am not at all sure that what is called "Minor Polish Draughts", the same moves and rules, but played on an ordinary chess or draughts board, did not exist before the hundred-square board was used for draughts. This game is played in Poland to some extent, and in Russia and Germany, and a little in most countries. The earliest reference to "Polish Draughts" -so far as is known- appeared in *The Craftsman*, of September '15, 1733. This was a London journal containing political skits. One of them was a paper on chess, and at the end of this the writer promises in a later number an account of "The game of Polish Draughts, where you will see the whole board engaged in the important business of making Kings. There you may observe the whole art of intrigue and bribery, fraud and force. This is a game of some skill, but more confused and irregular than that of chess". No doubt the writer meant the game on the large board, which was fashionable in Paris. But he did not fulfil his promise and write that paper, or if he did it was not printed. The first book on Polish Draughts appeared in Paris a few years later, but it is recorded that only 25 copies were printed, which is curious.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**Interior of the Café Manoury (Jacques Treton de Vaujas, 1775)**

Probably they were intended for distribution among friends. I am informed that the "Lallement" board, with fifty squares instead of the hundred of the ordinary board, is used for Polish Draughts by some or many of the French players, and further, that someone wrote, a good many years ago, to the effect that M. Lallement designed his board for the full Polish game-with fifty squares or diamonds-and not for ordinary checkers, which only wants, on such a board, thirty-two squares. So that when the Lallement board is used for our game it is an adaptation of the original and larger board. This may be so, but not if a statement in *The People's Draughts Book* is correct. That cheap and useful little work (to be had from *The People's Journal* office, Dundee, Scotland; price one penny) states of the smaller board, below a diagram of it: M. Lallement, a Frenchman, conceived the idea that the game could be played on a board with half the number of squares of that presently in use, in fact he stated that thirty-two of the squares were useless." If Lallement said that "thirty-two" were useless he probably

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

designed his board for ordinary checkers, or for “minor Polish”, or both. Or he may have designed both a large and small board, or both. I have not been able to see his book (published in 1802) of which I have given a brief description from my list, nor has any one I know. It has little about our game, though it may have a good deal about the Polish. But according to my list it is chiefly about a game compounded of chess and draughts, of M. Lallement’s own concoction. The book is in lists of chess works as well as of draughts. I have now, I think, finished with the antiquarian side of checkers: the game before the time of Payne, the first scientific writer on English Draughts. I have traced its history, or the chief point of it- all I know- from its origin in Spain or North Africa, in the thirteenth century, to the end of the seventeenth. By that time British Draughts, or Checkers -as some players in England still called it- had become also American, though the first American book on the game must have appeared much later, its date is one of the numerous things I do not know, and perhaps you, Mr. Editor, or one of your readers, can supply the information in a foot-note. On the scientific side of checkers, the evolution of modern analysis, and particulars of famous British and American players of the past century, I am not so well qualified to write as are some others; but, beginning with Payne, I will endeavour to complete this "History of Checkers".

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

## Comparing two Editions of An Introduction to the Game of Draughts

By William Payne (1756)

On the title page "together with" appears as "TOGETHER WITH" in the "A" edition and as "Together With" in the "B" edition ; Payne is a "Teacher of the Mathematics" in the "A" edition, but a "Teacher of Mathematics" in the "B" edition: in the price, the word sixpence is hyphenated (Six-pence) in the "A" edition and not in the "B" edition.

### "A" Edition

AN  
INTRODUCTION  
To the GAME of  
DRAUGHTS.  
CONTAINING  
FIFTY SELECT GAMES,

TOGETHER WITH

Many critical Situations for DRAWN GAMES,  
WON GAMES, and FINE STROKES.

The Whole designed for the Instruction of  
YOUNG PLAYERS, in this innocent and  
delightful AMUSEMENT,

By WILLIAM PAYNE,  
Teacher of the Mathematics.

L O N D O N :

Printed for the Author at the *Golden Ball* in *Bedford Street*,  
*Covent Garden*: And Sold by T. PAYNE, at the *Musick-Gate*  
in *Coffee Street*: J. MARSH, in *St Martin's Lane*: J. JACKSON,  
in *St James's Street*: W. SIMONDS, in *New Bond Street*:  
W. ODEY, in *Thet Street*: J. PAYNE, in *Paternoster-Row*  
and J. BROTHERTON, in *Cordwalk*.

MDCCCLVI.

[Price Two Shillings and Six-pence.]

### "B" Edition

AN  
INTRODUCTION  
To the GAME of  
DRAUGHTS.  
CONTAINING  
FIFTY SELECT GAMES,

Together with

Many critical Situations for DRAWN GAMES,  
WON GAMES, and FINE STROKES.

The Whole designed for the Instruction of  
YOUNG PLAYERS, in this innocent and  
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W. ODEY, in *Thet Street*: J. PAYNE, in *Paternoster-Row*  
and J. BROTHERTON, in *Cordwalk*.

MDCCCLVI.

[Price Two Shillings and Sixpence.]

Courtesy of:

<http://www.usacheckers.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=2291>

Two different printings in 1756.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

28 January 1912

The first game of checkers played in any part of America must have been of the Spanish variety, and probably the year was before 1500. English draughts may have been played almost as early in Newfoundland by the sailors of Cabot, of Bristol. More certain is it that the game must have been played in Virginia in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and in New England in the next reign James I. Among the "Pilgrim Fathers" who came in the Mayflower to New Plymouth, south of Boston, in 1620, and the emigrants who followed in the first half of the seventeenth century, there were certainly some checker-players, as also among the French emigrants to Canada of about the same time. The Englishmen brought the name of "checkers" with them as well as "draughts", but "checkers" prevailed, probably because the first emigrants to New England went chiefly from the eastern counties of old England, and were mostly farmers of countrymen. Of a later time, 1713, and dealing rather with French settlers and their children than British, Longfellow has given us a story in which our game is introduced: I While in silence the others sat and mused by the fireside, Till Evangeline brought the draught-board out of its corner. Soon was the game begun. In friendly contention the old man Laughed at each lucky hit, or unsuccessful maneuver, Laughed when a man was crowned, or a breach was made in the king-row. Perhaps it would not sound quite so well in the above, but "draughts-board" is the correct term, unless you prefer to call it a checkerboard. The word "draughts" is plural, and means "moves". A draught would be only one move. Before the end of the seventeenth century, both in Britain and North America, but especially, I should say, in Scotland and in London, English or British draughts or checkers must have become quite a scientific game to and among many players although no scientific book about it had appeared. It is matter of common knowledge that there are many who play a good game, and have considerable knowledge of endings and openings, who have never studied a draughts-book or played through a printed game. This must have

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

been still more the case before the days of newspaper "draughts columns". Such players learn by experience, and from one another, and there must have been many even in the fourteenth century.



**The Departure of The Pilgrim Fathers from Plymouth 1620**

As time went on the science of draughts was further developed, without books, and without much use of any notation, just as in old times men remembered long ballads, etc., without ever writing them down -many of them could not write- and taught their sons and others. No doubt some of them gave certain openings fancy names, which have long been lost, except perhaps, the "single corner". It required the newspaper and magazine press of a later time to fix the names of the openings, and to spread widely the accumulated results of scientific analysis. The draughts-books had a small circulation compared with the number of draughts-players, but of course they increased, from time to time, the total amount of scientific

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

knowledge that could be drawn upon. Spanish or other continental scientific knowledge must have had very little influence on British. There were no translations into English, and if there had been the differences in the games would have prevented them from being of much use. The profundities of British draughts had to be discovered with very little assistance from Spanish or any other, though some knowledge of the best ways of opening a game may have come with the game from Spain and France about 1300. I did not mean to go back to antiquarian matters, but all this is introductory to Payne, the first British writer -or the first who got his writing printed- on draughts as a scientific study; the first to attempt to point out, in print, the best ways to win or draw. He must have been one of the most expert players of the time, but I have no doubt that if he had not published a book some other strong players could, at that period, have done it nearly as well. But it is not everyone who is qualified to publish a book on some particular subject, and who is willing to do so, who can see his way to do it.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

4 February 1912

### NOTES

I have been asked what "al-kirk" meant in the Arabic language, and I find it meant "the game of moves" or "the moves", precisely what the word "draughts" meant in English from the time it was first used as the name of the game until about the end of the seventeenth century, when players and writers forgot what it did mean, and often spelt it "drafts". The early draughtsmen used in Spain were shaped as chess pawns, or were chess pawns taken from two sets, to give enough for 12 a side, and so were the "men" used for alquerque on the board of lines. Not always probably, but generally, according to old Spanish writers. This strengthens the idea that in early checkers, as in alquerque, the men could move backward as well forward. So that there was no promotion to "Queen" or "King" because a pawn could not be crowned<sup>51</sup>. If promoted he could only be exchanged for a differently shaped piece, as in chess. The chess example in time caused the checker pawns to be promoted on reaching the other side of the board by simply not allowing them to move backwards until they had done so. Then the inconvenience of the pawn shape caused the "men" to become very much as now, with a few extra to the set for "crowning" if required. The early Spanish alternative name for the game of "Damas", or "Marro de Punta", meant "merrels on the square"<sup>52</sup>, to distinguish it from merrils on the lines. From an English book of 1805 (Twiss, on chess and draughts and things in general), I find that the

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<sup>51</sup> I agree with Branch. However, Dr. Arie van der Stoep in: [www. http://www.draughtshistory.nl](http://www.draughtshistory.nl) follows another direction.

#### **Second claim: the long king is an Arab invention**

A scenario in which I don't see any weak point: an Arab tribe borrowed draughts from a Latin speaking tribe together with its name; the Arab tribe dropped its own name for the game. It seems plausible this happened before the 8th c. AD, when the Moors started to subject the Iberian peninsula. The long king is indigenous Arab, and must be an invention in a central Arab region.

Dr. Arie van der Stoep in [www. http://www.draughtshistory.nl](http://www.draughtshistory.nl)

<sup>52</sup> Punta in the term "Marro de Punta" means diagonal, thus moving diagonally,

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

Lallement board was first designed for Polish draughts, to be used instead of a board with a hundred squares. William Payne was a teacher of mathematics, and brother to a well-known London book-seller. In 1756 he published, in London, his treatise on the game, and much of it is good still. Payne knew the learned and afterwards, if not then, celebrated Dr. Johnson - the compiler of the first good English dictionary- and he got the doctor (as we learn from Boswell's "Life of Dr. Johnson") to write a "dedication", and also the preface.



**The Earl of Rochford**

It was customary in those days, as for long before, when any poor or not wealthy author published a book to dedicate it to some great person who was interested, or supposed to be, in the subject dealt with. The patron, besides lending his name, was expected to pay for a dozen or more copies of the work and give



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

them to his friends. Payne's book was dedicated to Lord Rochford, who had been something or other in the state service, and who, no doubt, was a draughts player. Dr. Johnson had played the game at college, but not afterwards, according to Boswell. Both dedication and preface are worthy of inclusion in this history. The dedication to the Earl of Rochford at the beginning of Payne's book runs:

My Lord, When I take the liberty of addressing to your lordship a treatise on the game of draughts, I easily foresee that I shall be in danger of suffering ridicule on one part, while I am gaining honour on the other, and that many who may envy me the distinction of approaching you, will deride the present I presume to offer. Had I considered that this little volume as having no purpose beyond that of teaching a game, I should indeed have left it to take its fate without a patron. Triflers may find or make anything a trifle; but since it is the great characteristic of a wise man to see events in their causes, to obviate consequences, and ascertain contingencies, your lordship will think nothing a trifle by which the mind is inured to caution, foresight and circumspection. The same skill, and often the same degree of skill, is exerted in great and little things, and your lordship may sometimes exercise at a harmless game those abilities which have been so happily employed in the service of your country. I am, my Lord, your lordship's most obliged, most obedient and most humble servant, William Payne.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The preface is longer, but I think of more interest, so I give it entire. We can see in this something of Payne's mind -the other is all Dr. Johnson- and he makes the first mention by name of English expert players other than himself:

It is a natural for a man to think well of the art which he professes to teach, and I may therefore be expected to have some esteem for the play of draughts. I would not, however, be thought to overrate it. Every art is valued in a joint proportion to its difficulty and usefulness. The use of draughts is the same with that of any other game of skill, that it may amuse those hours for which more laudable employment is not at hand, and happy is the man whose equability of temper and constancy of perseverance in better things, exempt him from the need of such reliefs. Whatever may be determined concerning its use, its difficulty is incontestable; for among the multitudes that practice it, very few understand it. There are indeed not many who by any frequency of playing can attain a moderate degree of skill without examples and instructions. I have therefore here given a collection of the most artful games, the most critical situations, and the most striking resolutions, that have fallen within my notice; which are such as may, in some respects, set this game even equal with that of chess. There is indeed one secret boasted in the world which I cannot teach. Some men pretend to an infallible method, by which he that moves first shall win the game; but no such hero has it ever been my fortune to encounter, and no such do I expect to find. Nor can it be proved that the first mover has any considerable advantage over a person equally skilful with himself. In this opinion I have the concurrence of those excellent players Mr. James Randell, Captain John Godfrey, and Mr. William Wolley, my intimate and worthy friends, whose examples have greatly contributed to my skill in the game; but in particular those of the great Randell, of whom it may with probability be asserted, that what he could not attain will never be discovered.

I find myself wondering whether Randell and Payne have met Wyllie and Martins, and compared notes. Payne's book has fifty games, of which thirty-eight are drawn. There are examples of most of the openings now in use, but they have no names. There also (not on diagrams) six critical situations" to draw games, then eight to win games, then twenty-four situations for strokes.

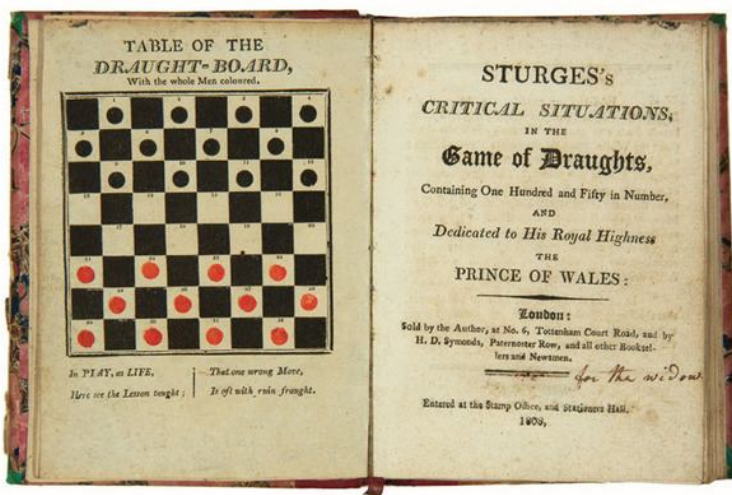
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The second English checker book was by W. Painter, 1787, according to Twiss, who wrote in 1805. I think he was right [he was] and that the modern books which say "1767" are wrong: some writer or printer mistaking the figure a long time ago and later writers repeating it. But this second English draughts book was only a pamphlet of twenty leaves, intended, as the title implies, for the study of those who could already play the game pretty well. The title page has "A Companion for the Draughts Player, containing 20 select games of draughts, showing the manner of moving the pieces to the best advantage; together with several critical situations to win games, and fine strokes, never before published: being the result of the practice and observation of some of the first players. By W. Painter, 1787". Twenty of the games are drawn; the "critical situations" are eight in number and the "fine strokes" twenty-four. I get this information from Twiss 1805. Painter's little book is very rare. Twiss gives a lot of space to Polish draughts, with examples of positions and fine play and some chat about its supposed origin: in experimenting as to what might happen if the "men" could take backwards. This origin of Polish Draughts, with ten-by-ten board to give the men more play, is placed about 1700. It was played in London soon after that date, but never became nearly so popular in England as in France, Belgium and Holland. But it seems to have been the only draughts that Twiss cared to play. He mentions that he had seen a Spanish draughts book of about 1600, containing only ends of games, with "cuts of the board". These would be what we call diagrams.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

11 February 1912

Boswell, in his life of Dr. Johnson, remarks that it was a matter of regret that the doctor had not kept up his knowledge of draughts after leaving college, as in his old age he was lonely and melancholy. He had never learned to play either chess or card games. Of the game of draughts Boswell remarks that "It provides an innocent soothing relief", and is "peculiarly calculated to fix the attention without straining it. There is a composure and gravity in draughts which insensibly tranquilizes the mind; and, accordingly, the Dutch are fond of it, as they are of smoaking". (The Dutch "smoaked" a lot more than the English in the eighteenth century, but there is not much difference now. I am "smoaking" as I write this). In the last year of the eighteenth century a much bigger book than Payne's, was published by Joshua Sturges, an innkeeper of London, a superior man, intellectually, to the generality of innkeepers, with all due respect to them.



### The book of Joshu Sturges

He dedicated his "Guide to Draughts", by permission, to the Prince of Wales (afterwards George We may suppose, therefore,

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

that the prince knew how to play the game. If he had given more time to it, and less to some other things, his memory would be more respected. Sturges was the London champion of his time, and a man of means, and some literary ability. The title page of his book shows all this: "Guide to the game of draughts, containing 500 select games, together with 140 striking situations, exhibiting games drawn, and won, by critical strokes; comprising almost every possible variety which the board can display, and rendered plain and familiar to the learner, by clever arrangement, and explanatory directions. The whole designed to form the scientific and accomplished player in the pleasing but difficult game of draughts. By Joshua Sturges, London, 1800." The book has a list of above 400 subscribers. From the lengthy preface I quote the first and last paragraphs. To ascertain distinctly consequences in their causes -to calculate with promptitude the result of intricate variety- to elude by vigilant caution the snares of stratagem, are lessons which the game of draughts strongly inculcates and uniformly explains. While, thus, the game on one hand affords the means of intellectual improvement; on the 'other, it banishes every temptation to moral depravity. It guards simplicity from the lures of deceit, and prevents cunning from preying on credulity; for where superior skill alone commands success, the ignorant are not mad enough to hazard their fortune or their happiness in a contest where loss is certain, and gain impossible. Considering the game as a amusement, it cannot be denied that it tends to improve those faculties of the mind which are eminently useful in every condition of life; and may therefore be made the school of wisdom, but cannot, like the gaming table of chance, become the nursery of vice." In short, the author entertains a hope, that the numerous improvements he has introduced, will, in the estimation of judges, raise the game of draughts in rank and consideration equal to that of chess; and that whatever fate his book may experience from the surly critic, the liberal student will at least allow, that he has increased the number of his enjoyments, by enlarging the circles of innocent and useful amusements." There are no diagrams in this book, but some

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

appear in a second edition, published in 1808. Three editions have appeared since, Kear's being well known now. Sturges died in 1813. I extract the following from "T.P.'s Weekly" of a few years ago.

By the way, Hanway Street has some interest for lovers of the game of draughts. When passing it in Tottenham Court Road you may notice that the tavern at the corner bears the name of the Blue Posts. This house was once kept by a man named Joshua Sturges. He was the author of a well-known 'Guide to the Game of Draughts', published in 1800, and dedicated to the Prince of Wales. Sturges' epitaph in St. Pancras churchyard has long been obliterated, but it bore curious testimony to his skill as a draught player and his qualities as a man. Here it is, as preserved in an old volume of 'Notes and Queries': Sacred to the memory of Mr. Joshua Sturges, many years a Respectable Licensed Victualler in this Parish; who departed this Life the 12th of August 1813. Aged 55 years. He was esteemed for the many excellent Qualities he possessed, and his desire to improve the minds, as also to benefit the trade of his Brother Victuallers. His genius was also eminently displayed to create innocent and national amusement to mankind, in the Production of his treatise on the difficult game of Draughts, which Treatise received the approbation of his Prince, and many other distinguished characters. In private life he was mild and unassuming; in his public capacity neither the love of Interest or domestic ease could separate this faithful Friend from the Society of which he was a member, in the Performance of Duties which his mind deemed Paramount to all others. His example was worthy of imitation in this world. May his Virtues be rewarded in the next. Peace to his Soul, and respected be his Memory". If the draughts world possessed a millionaire I should suggest to him that he might erect a marble stone at the grave of Sturges, with the epitaph as here given.

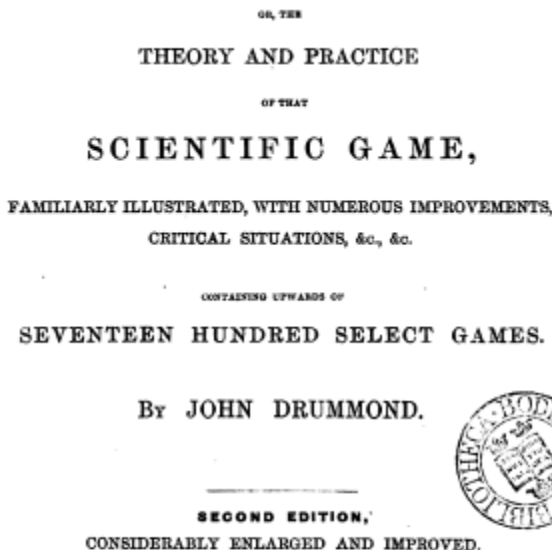
**18 February 1912**

The literature of draughts is much more extensive than that of any other game except chess, and in the English language alone

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

the technical draughts books for instructional purpose -apart from collections of games and problems- are not very far short of those of chess, especially if we ignore the books that are quite obsolete as to their practical utility and which are only of antiquarian interest. I have described the three first English draughts books, those by Payne, Painter and Sturges. Of the latter work three editions have appeared since the first: Sturges' second edition, the first English draughts book, with diagrams; and Walker's edition of 1835, and Kear's edition, with much fresh matter, of a few years ago. The next writer to Sturges was Sinclair, the first of the Scottish school who have done so much to popularize a scientific study of the game; he published a treatise at Glasgow in 1832. Then followed J. Drummond's (Falkirk) first edition, 1838. In 1845 and 1852 Andrew Anderson, of Carlisle, Scotland, published his "Game of draughts simplified", and laid down the rules now generally observed, including the playing on the dark squares, which no doubt was then the usual custom in Scotland but not in England (Payne and Sturges played on the white). Later authors of checker treatises have been Hay, Spayth, Bowen, Janvier, Barker, Robertson, Hill, Lees, McCulloch, Kear and Atwell, these two latter producing the "Encyclopedia of Draughts", and Atwell, of London, shortly before his death, a book of problems and end games with remarks in original style. Other collections of problems have appeared and several hand books of the game, from a shilling down to a penny. It is safe to say that among the poorer classes, the mass of population of the English-speaking world, draughts literature has had during the last fifty years a greater sale than chess literature. Chess books are generally higher priced and otherwise would not pay their cost which they do not always do. Two or three of the above-mentioned writers were Americans.

# The History of Checkers (Draughts)

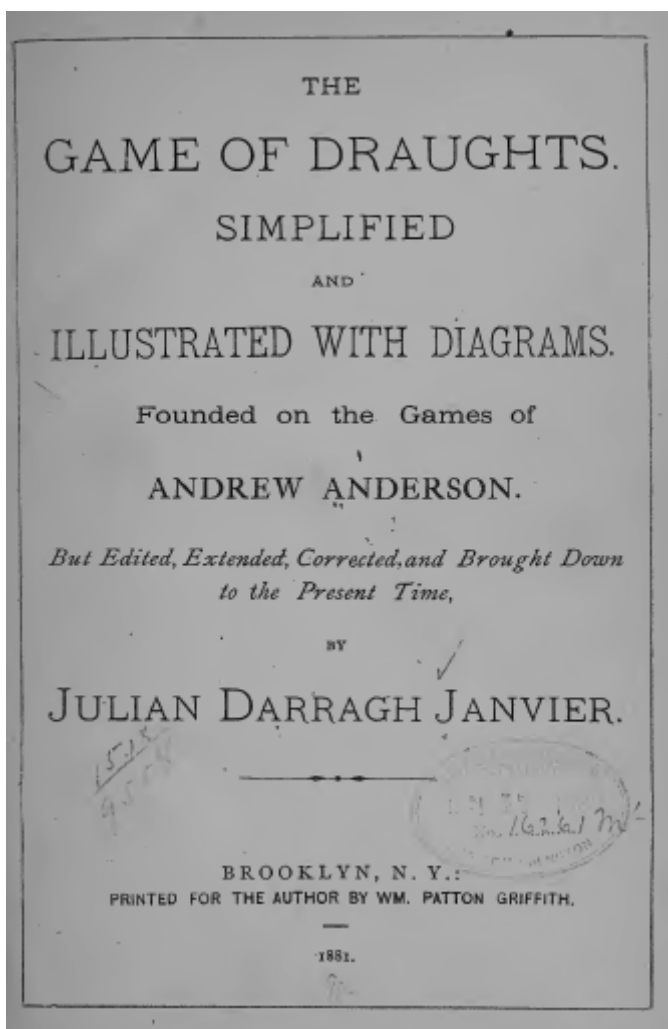


## The draughts-book of John Drummond, 1852

But I know so little of American draughts writers, organizations and events, that I suggest that Mr. Kerr or some other authority for him should write for the Pittsburg Leader a supplement to this history, giving an account of the progress of checkers in the United States from the earliest known time to the present. But I am aware of three American facts.



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



The draughts-book of Anderson, in this case of 1882

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

The late Dr. R.D. Yates, of Brooklyn, was so strong a player that he defeated Wyllie, the Scottish and British champion, in a match played in America. At a later time, and rather recently, the first British team to visit the States won the match with a score of 74 wins to 34, and 284 draws. And the Pittsburg Leader has the biggest draughts department that I have seen in a newspaper or journal. Before saying something of the chief events and of some noted players in the Anglo-American draughts (mostly, I fear, Anglo) I think it may be of interest to account for the origin of the names of the draughts openings, so far as I can, from an authority at hand, the Scottish People's Draughts Book. Except, perhaps, the "single corner" and the "double corner" all these names are very modern compared with the game, or, in most cases, the openings themselves. It would be of interest to know what they, or some of them, were called - if anything- in Scotland or England or America before they got their present names. I think it probable that some of them had names, at least in Scotland, among experts. But the list is too long for this week.



**James Wyllie**  
(<http://www.wylliedraughts.com>)

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**25 February 1912**

The names of the openings and their reputed origins are here given.

**Alma-** 11-15, 23-19, 8-11, 22-17, 3-8(A), 25-22(B), 11-16. A-This with the previous moves form the opening, which was named "Alma" by Drummond, who published an analysis of the game during the Crimean war, and wished to commemorate the first British victory.



**Crimean war. Author Valentin Ramirez (Wikipedia).**

B-is the only safe reply for White. If then Black plays 9-14 instead of 11-16; 26-23, 5-9 runs into the "Whilter" game. **Ayrshire Lassie-** 11-15, 24-20, 8-11, 28-24(A), 4-8(B). A-forms the opening, so named by Wyllie in compliment to a charming maiden of the county of Ayr, who was watching some of his match-play. B - 9-14 is as good, but seldom played.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**Bristol-** 11-16, 24-20, 16-19-24-20 forms the opening, and anything but 16-19 in reply is weak. Anderson named the opening, in recognition of the labours of Mr. Albert Brown, of Bristol in this analysis. It may be continued 23-16, 12-19, 22-18, the only move to give an equal game.

**Bristol Cross-** 11-16, 23-18(A), 16-20(B), 24-19(C). A-forms the opening, so named by Robertson. Canalejas published play on this opening in 1650, but it was not much played or known in Britain till after Robertson drew attention to it. B-is safest at this point, though 8- 11 is good. C-26-23 will draw, but is not so good.

**Centre-** 11-15, 23-19, 8-11, 22-17, 15-18 forms the opening, named by Janvier. 19-15 now gives White the best game.

**Cross-** 11-15, 23-18, so named by Anderson because White's first move is played across the path of Black's. The opening allows Black much variety of attack.

**Defiance-** 11-15, 23-19, 9-14, 27-23, 8-11. The opening is formed by 27-23, and was named by Anderson in 1847 when playing it against Wyllie; it defies or prevents the formation of the "Fife".

**Denny-** 10-14, 22-17, 7-10. The first move forms the opening, named by Drummond in honour of the town (in Scotland) where he resided when his works on the game were published. 22-17 is the strongest reply, 7-10 is then Black's best.

**Double Corner-** 9-14 forms the opening, so named because the first move is played from one double corner towards the other. 22-18 is a usual reply. The opening gives an equally balanced game.

**Dundee-** 12-16, 24-20. The first move forms the opening, which received its name from the late Mr. A.J. Dunlap, of New York, about 45 years ago, in compliment to the Dundee players who published an analysis of the opening. 24-20 is the only strong reply.

**Dyke-** 11-15, 22-17, 15-9. The third move forms the opening, which received its name from the peculiarity of some of the variations where the pieces are formed into straight lines. Black has an advantage in this opening, but White can draw.

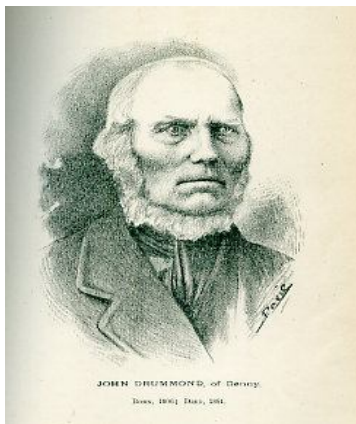
## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**Edinburgh-** 9-13 forms the opening, which is the weakest Black can adopt. White should reply with 22-18. Why this weak opening is named after the strong city of Edinburgh appears to be unknown. Black is always thought to have done well if he draws the game.

**Fife-** 11-15, 23-19, 9-14, 22-17, 5-9 forms the opening invented by Wyllie in 1847. It is a powerful one for Black, and contains some of the most beautiful strategy of the draughts-board. 17-13 is considered White's best reply.

**Glasgow-** 11-15, 23-19, 8-11, 22-17, 11-16 forms the opening so named because a favourite with the Glasgow players nearly or quite a hundred years ago. It is therefore one of the oldest of the names, and the opening has been so thoroughly analyzed that between experts every game may be expected to be a draw.

**Kelso-** 10-15, 21-17, 11-16. The first move forms the opening, which was named by Drummond. Kelso is a Scottish town. The opening is a popular one, but from Black's point of View its fault is that White has a great variety of reply; but 21-17 is as good as any, and 11-16 is Black's best reply.



**Sketch of John Drummond (<http://www.checkerworld.com/>)**

**Laird and Lady-** 11-15, 23-19, 8-11, 22-17, 9-13, 17-14, 10-17, 21-14 forms the opening, named by Anderson in compliment to a Lanarkshire "Laird" and his wife. If White takes the piece

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

by 19-10 the "Doctor" opening is formed, so called because it was invented or much played by a Scottish doctor, or a good player known as "The Doctor", perhaps 50 years ago.

**Maid of the Mill-** 11-15, 22-17, 8-11, 17-13, 15-18 forms the opening, named by Anderson in compliment to a Scottish miller's daughter who is said to have introduced this opening, and who was in any case a strong player. It was formerly considered weak for White, but is now held to be an even game.

**Old Fourteenth-** 11-15, 23-19, 8-11, 22-17, 4-8 forms the opening, so named, perhaps a hundred years ago, because it was the fourteenth game in the works of Payne and Sturges. It is so well known that the average player can nearly always draw.

**Paisley-** 11-16, 24-19 forms the opening, named by Janvier. 8-11, 22-18, 10-14 is a frequent continuation. 22-17, 9-14, 25-22 runs into the "Double Corner".

**Second Double Corner-** 11-15, 24-19 makes the opening, the second player adopting the Double Corner formation.

**Single Corner-** 11-15, 22-18. Probably the oldest of the openings, and on which more play has been published than on any other. The "Goose Walk" [a trap] may become visible in this game. Also the "Will o' the Wisp" opening.

**Souter-** 11-15, 23-19, 9-14, 27-17, 6-9 forms the opening, so named from the Scotch for shoemaker, and evidently invented or brought forward, many years ago, by a Scotch shoemaker. The game abounds in traps and pitfalls, but experts seldom lose, as this game has been very much analyzed.

**Switcher-** 11-15, 21-17 forms the opening, which at one time was a favourite of Wyllie's. Black should reply with 9-13, and is thought to have rather the best game, but it abounds in intricate situations offering chances for White to win if Black makes a weak move. I suppose the name is due to the fact that White switches off some of the usually possible Black attacks.

**Whilter-** 11-15, 23-19, 9-14, 22-17, 7-11 is said to form the opening, but 11-15, 23-19, 7-11 is also classed as a Whilter, so that doubt exists as to whether the third or the fifth move completes the formation. The name Whilter is from Wholter (Scotch) signifying an overturning or state of confusion, yet

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

many pretty points can be shown in the game. Martin's famous “shot” is in this game.

**Will o' the Wisp-** 11-15, 23-19, 9-13 forms the opening, so named by a Glasgow player many years ago: George Wallace. It is sound for both sides, but the idea of the name is that some lines of play are deceiving to the student. Most of this information about the openings is from “The People's Draughts Books”, a Scotch production. So far as the openings may now have names in Spanish and other languages they would in most cases, if not in all, be different names.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**3 March 1912**

I have come across an English games book of 1837, compiled by Donald Walker, containing 14 pages of English draughts and the same of Polish, with some games from Sturges in the “English” section. D.W. says the men are placed on the white squares (in both games) in England and France, but on the black in Holland and Germany.



**Games and Sports of Donald Walker, 1837**

He does not mention Scotland, the players of which country have created the rule, now generally adopted by the English-speaking world, of playing on the black. I think it was after 1860 before this custom became general in England, and it is not universal yet. But in Scotland it was the general rule before 1837, and, I think, in the eighteenth century. It may have sprung from the fact that many of the old boards were boxboards, folding with rather clumsy hinges. These, in one position of the board, would get in the way when pushing a man, but less so if the board was turned. Having to have the double corner at the right hand would, or might, then make it necessary to play on the black squares. Whatever the cause, the first Scottish writers on draughts were brought up in the “black” rule, and the Scottish



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

books being, in modern times, more numerous and more important than the English, the rules laid down in them became general or nearly so in England, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc.

### NOTE

Mr. Murray writes me from Cambridge -where there is a large library of rare books and ancient manuscripts-“It will interest you to hear that only last Friday in examining a recently discovered note on chess in a manuscript here which is attributed to the thirteenth century I found a page with diagrams of, first, the backgammon board; second, the nine men’s morris board; third, the alquerque board with the twelve men a side arranged for play. This is the first evidence for any knowledge of the alquerque game in England. I had previously discovered evidence of it in France. There is no text, and no name for any of the three games.’

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**10 March 1912**

The good checker player must have some knowledge of the openings, and the more the better. But it seems to me that in checkers as in chess the learner who know little more than the moves should not spend much time over the analysis of openings until after he has given some study to endings, and knows how to manage a few pieces pretty well: to win with two Kings to one against best play, and three to two, and to draw in simple positions where the novice would or might lose, although to an expert the position would be an obvious draw. Then to get a better idea of the strategy of checkers than he can at first from the early part of the game, he should, on a numbered board if he can't easily remember what the squares are, play through the solutions of some dozens of end games and problems. The four positions -to be found in any good handbook of the game- and other end game studies, especially, and some problems. Then he will better be able to see a connection between good and careful play in the opening and a winning position in the ending, even when the win is not for him. The four positions were discovered, rather than invented, by the eighteenth century experts. Many other positions with a win or a draw a little concealed, now considered to be more or less elementary, were known to them, and most of them, I have no doubt, were known long before their time. During the nineteenth century, especially the second half, a great number of more intricate positions have been added to the stock, besides a host of problems, which as a rule are rather different in style from what is technically known as an end game, though there is not so much difference as there is between chess "end games" and modern chess problems". Nearly all the chess problems composed within the last twenty or thirty years are positions which, though legally "possible", are practically impossible in actual play. Only a small proportion of the draughts-problems printed could be so described. Here are some of the remarkable situations possible in checkers that have been produced by expert players or noted problemists long since the time of Sturges. It has been written of them: "These may be

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

termed the distinguished positions of the game. The play in every case is critical and noteworthy: hence the distinctive titles applied to them.”

**Cowan's Coup-** Black men on 9.10.11.12.14.17. White men 18.19.20.21.23.24. White to play and draw: 19-16, 12-28, 23-19, 14-23, 21-7.

**Dean's Position-** Black man 12, Black Kings 10 and 11. White men 20 and 28. White King 1. Black to play and win. The solution is in thirty-five moves, of both sides. I only give a few: 10-15, 11-6, 15-19, 6-10, 19-23, 10-14, 11-15, 14-9, 23-27, 9-14, 27-32, 14-9, 15-11, 9-14, 12- 16 etc.

**Barker' s Triangle-** Black men 5.23.28, King 4. White man 11, Kings 15.22. White to play and draw: 22-17, 28-32, 15-19, 23-26, 17-14, 32-27, 19-16, 27-23, 16-12, 26-30, 11-7, 30-25, 7-2, 25- 22, 2-6, 22-18, 6-9, 18-15, 9-6, 23-19, 6-2, 15-11, 12-8,19-15, 8-12. Drawn. There are variations, in one of which, if White allows Black King on 4 to combine with the other two Black Kings, we get what is called "Strickland's Position". Barker's Triangle originally appeared in Pittsburg, Pa.

**The F.N. Johnson Positions-** Mr. F.N. Johnson, of Chicago, published two positions which are of frequent occurrence in the course of play, and which the student should master. But there are too many variations for me to give the solutions here. One position is: Black Kings 14.15.22. White man 29. Kings 6 and 7. Black to play and win. First move is 22-17. The other position is: Black Kings 11.19.23. White men 20.31. King 28. First move: 19-15.

**The Fifth Position-** Black men 6.11.12.13.14. White men 19.20.21.22.23. Black to play and draw. First move: 13-17.

**Wyllie's Draw-** Black man 5. Kings 1 and 6. White Kings 14.18. Black to play, White to draw. 6-9, 14-10, 9-13, 18-14, 13-9, 14-18, 9-6, 10-14, 6-2, 14-10, 5-9, 10-14, 1-5, 14-10, 9-13, 10- 14 (or 18-22) etc.

**The Macintosh Position-** Black man 3. Kings 7.15. White men 12.16. King 24. Black to play, White to draw. If 7-2, 24-20, 2-6, 20-24, 3-7, 12-8, 6-2, 8-4, 15-11, 16-12 drawn. If, first, 7-

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

10, 24-20, 3-7, 16-11, 15-8, 12-3 drawn. There are other variations.

**Tregaskis's Draw-** Black man 25. King 14. White men 21.27.28. Black to play and draw: 25-30, 27-23 or 28-24. The play is long and difficult.

**Strickland's Position-** Black man 5. Kings 16.19.20. White Kings 7.11.17. Black to play and win: 19-23, 17-14, 16-19, 7-10, 20-24, 10-7, 24-27, 7-10, 27-31, 10-7, 31-26, 7-10, 26-30, 10-7, 23-26, 7-10, 19-23, 11-15 etc. This position is more often drawn than won. It was originally published in the Glasgow Herald about thirty years ago, by Strickland, then the champion blindfold player. His solution was found to be not quite sound, but it was made so by R. Bush, a north of England expert. The position with its corrected solution has been described as the finest draughts-problem in existence.



WILLIAM STRICKLAND.

**William Strickland (Image from "The Draughts World")**

**Bowen's Twins-** Black man 3. Kings 11.19.27. White men 12.20. Kings 1 and 2. Black to play, White to draw: 27-23, 1-6,

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

19-15, 6-1, 15-18, 1-6, 18-22, 6-9, 22-17, 2-6, 23-19, 6-10, 11-7, 10-6, 19-15, 6-2, 7-11, 9-6, 17-14, 20-16, 11-20, 6-10, 15-6, 2-19. Drawn. There are several variations.

The same position: White to play, Black to win. If any of my readers are curious to see the full solutions of this and other ending perhaps the Leader checker editor, Mr. Kerr, will oblige in another column. They can be found in The Problemists' Guide by W. Whyte, the Dundee People's Journal office. This book was published in 1901; price one shilling.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**17 March 1912**

Before giving some little account of modern players and events, I will finish with what is connected with the literature of the game: the checker magazines and newspaper columns. The first periodical to contain a checker department -some newspapers in England and Scotland had previously, occasionally, reported draughts matches- was the Kaleidoscope, a Liverpool journal, in 1821. It ceased a few years later, in 1826, according to my notes. A Mr. Edgerton Smith was the first "Draughts Editor". There appear to have been no others till the New York journal, called Porter's Spirit of the Times, published a checker column in October, 1856. Wilkes' Spirit of the Times, also of New York, began one in September, 1859, which continued till 1866. L'Illustration, of Paris, had one in 1857, and also the Chicago Leader. The Scottish columns began in the sixties: The Scottish Banner, Edinburgh, November, 1861; Dundee News, 1862; Glasgow Penny Post and Glasgow Sentinel, before 1865; Paisley Gazette, 1868. Other columns in the sixties were: Newcastle Chronicle, 1861; Weekly Household Journal, New York, 1861; Cassell's Illustrated, London, 1861; American Sportsman, Philadelphia, 1860; Independent Democrat, Times, Dublin, 1861; New York, Turf, Elyria, O., before 1865; Leeds Express, England, January, 1865; Irish Sporting Field and Farm, 1865; Our Mutual Friend, Detroit, 1869; the Gentlemen's Journal, London, 1869.

In 1910 the catalogue which gives this information contained the names of three hundred newspapers and periodicals which had checker columns or pages, but many of them were then extinct, or had ceased to have "checkers". It is estimated that there are now 150 in the world, nearly all in the English language. The United States has about 70; England, 30; Scotland, 20; Canada, 7; Australia, 6; New Zealand, 5; France, 16. There have been two or three Spanish, but they are reported to be extinct, with no new ones, which is surprising. I presume that the French columns deal only with what is called Polish Draughts, except

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

that they would sometimes have a little news of the Anglo-American draughts-world.

### NOTES

Most of the information above comes from a bibliography of checkers compiled by Mr. J.G. White<sup>53</sup>, of Cleveland, U.S. That gentleman has long been a collector of chess and checker books and everything connected with the literature of both games, and has the largest chess library in the world -over 4.000 items- and one of the largest of checkers, about 2.000 items, including a large number of photographs of players. The collection includes some rare draughts books, and the first series of newspaper draughts-columns, with other early specimens.



**Courtesy of Mary Ann Sullivan.**

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<sup>53</sup> Yatabe Reece, Motoko B. (1979). John Griswold White, trustee, and the White collection in the Cleveland public library. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Library Science) in The University of Michigan.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**24 March 1912**

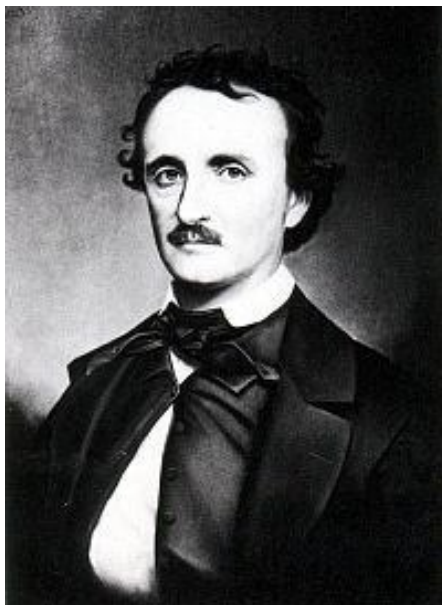
In former times the players of renown, both in checkers and chess, generally published a book or two each. Those who did not, at any rate as to checkers, are forgotten (except that three English names are preserved in Payne's preface) this largely because of the limited and, in the first century-and-a-half of the game non-existent use of the printing press. There may have been, probably were, some draughts manuscripts before the time of printing, which would now be of much interest and some value, but if so, they have long been lost, as, I am sure, hundred of ancient chess manuscripts have been, leaving only a few survivors from their periods. Of noted checker players, as such, of before about 1840 who did not publish any treatise on the game, I only know the names of Payne's three friends, strong players, especially "the great Randell". He would have been pleased to know that his name would some day be mentioned in the Pittsburg Leader! (By the way, Pittsburg, named after the English statesman. Pitt, afterwards Earl of Chatham, was established, in a very small way, in Randell's time). Of course, there were many eminent persons who played checkers at times, from about 1300 onwards. But of before the nineteenth century I am only sure, by name, of Queen Elizabeth, Mary Queen of Scots and Dr. Johnson. Later on there were the Duke of Wellington, Queen Victoria and her husband, Prins Bismarck, and no doubt many others, including Longfellow and Edgar Allan Poe.

I am under the impression that Lord Nelson played the game, but I forgot the authority. Of the modern celebrities of the draughts world who did not publish books the name of James Wyllie stands first -at any rate on the British side of the water- if we except as possibly stronger players by reason of more extended book knowledge, the result of quite modern scientific analysis, the late Richard Jordan and the two or three strongest players of today. Wyllie's name comes first, also, in order of time. He was born on July 6, 1818, at Piershill Barracks,



## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

Edinburgh. He began to play draughts at 14, and in a short time was able to beat anyone in his district. He was apprenticed as a carpet weaver, but didn't like it, and became a pedlar, travelling around the country and displaying his skill in draughts at the same time. From an incident of this period he gained his soubriquet of "the Herd Laddie", which never left him. A cattle farmer named Porteous, of Biggar, was delighted with his skill at draughts, and proposed to take him to Edinburgh to give the best players there a surprise. Wyllie agreed, and it was arranged that he should pretend to be the farmer's "herd laddie". At Edinburgh, Mr. Porteous first played an opponent several games at a shilling a game, and then left on the plea of business, but suggested that his "herd laddie" should take his place on the same terms.



**Edgar Allan Poe (Wikipedia)**

This was readily agreed to, and on the farmer's return he found that Wyllie had won a considerable sum of money. After this

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

exploit Wyllie engaged in a series of matches for large sums, with constant success, and, although I have not read so, I should say that he gave up peddling and became a professional draughts player. In 1838 he played his first match with Andrew Anderson, the celebrated player and writer, and lost it, at Edinburgh. After this he played several heavy stake matches and won them all, and then wended his way into England, playing without defeat a series of matches with English players, one of the matches being for £130 a side. Returning to Scotland, still a young man, he played four more matches with Anderson. He lost the last one, and I have no particulars of the others. Perhaps he drew one, or two. But as Anderson soon afterwards retired from the championship, his mantle fell upon Wyllie. Later on he twice visited the United States and Canada, with the same general success as at home, but he was defeated in a match by the American champion, Dr. R.D. Yates, of Brooklyn. Wyllie afterwards visited Australia and New Zealand, beating everyone there. At home, or in Scotland, he played several matches for the championship of Scotland -practically of the British Isles- with Martins, losing one and drawing one, but winning most, including the last one by 10 to 4, with 38 draws. This was a subscription match, played at Glasgow and Manchester. The total scores of their championship matches shows 22 wins for Wyllie, 19 for Martins, and 300 draws. Wyllie died about 14 years ago. Though he never published a book, his match games were all printed, and largely made up the modern literature of the game. Some amusing or interesting stories about Wyllie are scattered in old magazine volumes. Here is one. He was playing all comers in a village in Scotland for two days, and no one had been able to draw with him. The local champion had a parting game with Wyllie on the second night, and in this Wyllie gave a man away and led his opponent into the Second Position. The forces being equal, the local players suggested that the game was a draw, and the local expert began to exult. Wyllie looked up at his antagonist in a sympathetic manner, and quickly remarked: "Oh, no; I think I can win it in 83 moves!" Imagine the astonishment of the others at any man being able to see 83

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

moves ahead. To them it seemed almost supernatural. In 1894 Wyllie, then an old man, lost the championship to Ferrie.

Robert Martins, Wyllie's frequent friendly opponent, was born at Penryn, Cornwall, in 1822, and after a time in London he settled in Scotland. He once (1859) wrested what was at the time considered the world's championship from Wyllie, in a match for a heavy stake. He died in 1905. He was a professional draughts player during the greater part of his life in Scotland, and he also played the violin well. I should add that he visited the States and lost matches with Dr. Yates and C.F. Barker, and beat others.



**Dr. R. D. Yates (Courtesy of [www.checkerworld.com](http://www.checkerworld.com))**

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**31 March 1912**

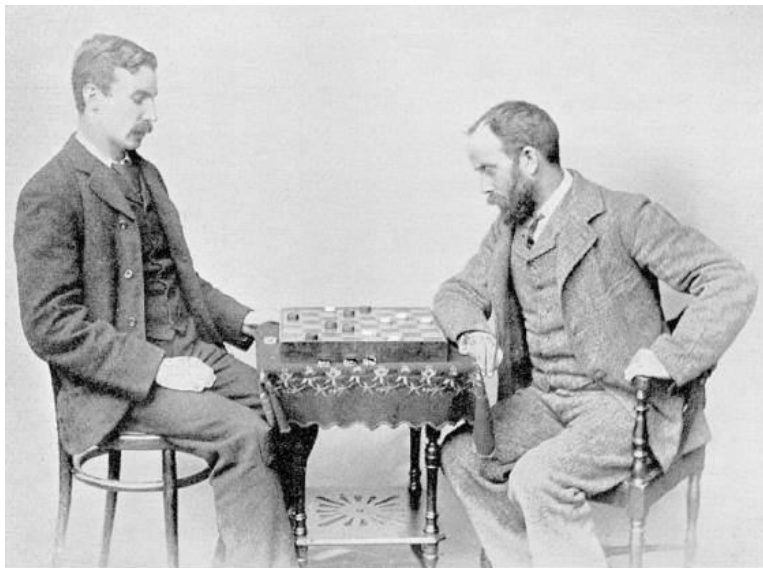
I leave the subject of American checkers almost entirely to someone on your side who is much better qualified to deal with it. But my investigations convince me that in Dr. R.D. Yates America had a checker player who was equal at least to any one who has lived since, and superior to any player of or before his own time. He was the Paul Morphy of checkers, and Morphy was also an American. I do not know just when Yates was born, or in what year he died [1857-1885], but I think his death was in 1877, as I find that Wyllie, who had lost a match with him, ranked as champion of the world from that year [1885] on to 1894, when he was defeated by Ferrie. Yates must have died rather young, or in early middle age, for Martins, who also lost to him, spoke of him as "a boy", and a boy (or young man) who was invincible. I find this quotation from an American book, by W.T. Call: "A schoolboy chum, who asked his friend 'Bob' (Yates) just before one of his important matches, whether he felt nervous about the contest. 'He told me', said the narrator, 'he did not feel at all nervous, as he said he knew the meaning of every move on the board, and the only thing he had to look out for was some bad move by his opponent.' This wayside remark, made as a mere generalization to gratify the natural curiosity of an old friend, is nevertheless directly in line with the authoritative statement of Martins that there was no hope of catching the boy on anything." Robert Yates was one of the best "blindfold" players, in the latter part of his career. This -checker playing sans voir (without sight)- was then a new thing, of which I say a little farther on. After the death of Yates, Wyllie was recognized as the world's champion, and in several contests successfully defended the title until 1894, when James Ferrie -a brother Soot- defeated him by 13 to 6, besides draws. But two years later the late Richard Jordan, probably the strongest checker player that Scotland or Britain has ever produced, defeated Ferrie by 4 to 3. In 1897 he beat R. Stewart; and in 1900 he visited America and in Boston played a match with C.F. Barker, with honours divided: two won each. Jordan continued

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

to hold the title for several years, and then retired. C.F. Barker, of U.S., and Ferrie and G. Buchanan, of Scotland, each claimed, or had claimed for them by friends, this title of world's champion. I should have given it to Barker, till lately, Alfred Jordan, of London, has this year won the Scottish championship, and last year, as I understand, he carried all before him in America. The "Scottish championship" does not seem to have been competed for before 1893. But for the previous 80 years Anderson, Wyllie, Martins, and Wyllie again, were considered to be champions of Scotland in their turn, and of the world "more or less", before and after Yates' time as a master player. No Englishman has ever ranked so high as Anderson and Wyllie till within the last few months, but making allowance for their earlier times I think that Payne, Randell, and Sturges should be remembered as possibly their equals in natural aptitude for the game. Till rather lately superiority at checkers was shown in single combat -individual matches- as regards the individual championship of a city, county or nation, and I have read that this is still so in the United States. In Britain, probably first in London or Manchester about 30 years ago, the checker tournament is now well known, and the English championship has been decided by tournament play since 1885, and the Scottish since 1893. Till quite lately these tourneys were on the "knock-out" principle, but are now played, like the ordinary chess tourney, on the opposite plan: each competitor plays games with all the others, and the victor is he who scores most. In case of a tie for first place the two leaders play a short match. The first English championship tourney was played in 1885 at Manchester, and the championship was won by J. Smith, of Spennymoor, Yorkshire. Another was not played until after Smith's death. The tourneys were held in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and one (1909) at Southport. The English champions, and their places of residence since 1890, have been 1891, H. Christie, Sunderland; 1892, A. Jordan, London. The English Draughts Association was established in 1898, since which date there have been more tourneys, and a considerable increase in the number of clubs and county associations. 1898,

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

W. Gardner, Leeds; 1900, A. Hynde, Manchester; 1902, A. Cain, Liverpool; 1904, H. Morrall, Liverpool; 1906, A. Alexander, Birmingham; 1907, A. Jordan, London; 1908, A. Jordan, London; 1909, A. Jordan, London.



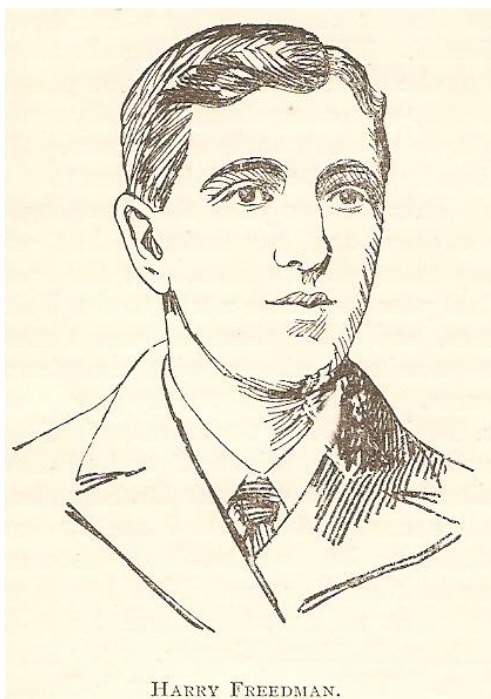
**R. Jordan – J. Ferrie**

(Courtesy of <http://www.online-museum-of-checkers-history.com>)

There has been no contest since 1909, but another will commence this Easter, in London. At present Alfred Jordan is the English as well as the Scottish champion. He is the first Englishman (except Martins) to win the championship of Scotland. My own idea is that such contests should not be open to those who are not natives or residents of the country concerned. (I hope the printer will keep in these two "nots"). The English championship cup was presented to the association by Mr. G.A. Geisthorpe in 1902. The winners of the Scottish championship since the tournaments began have been:

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

1893	W. Bryden	1900	R. Stewart	1907	G. Buchanan
1894	R. Stewart	1901	R. Stewart	1908	J. Ferrie
1895	R. Stewart	1902	R. Stewart	1909	G.M. Bonar
1896	R. Jordan	1903	J. Ferrie	1910	
1897	J. Ferrie	1904	J Ferrie	1911	J. Ferrie
1898	H.Freedman	1905	G.Buchanan	1912	A.Jordan
1899	H. Freedman	1906	G. Buchanan		



(Courtesy of <http://www.online-museum-of-checkers-history.com>)

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**7 April 1912**

The Draughts World some years ago had this paragraph: "Landmarks of Checker Literature: Payne, Sturges, Sinclair, Anderson, Drummond, Janvier, Bowen, Lyman, Gould, Lees, Hepner. The master players: Anderson, Wyllie, Yates, Martins, Barker, Reed, Freeman, Ferrie, R. Jordan, Stewart. Blindfold artists: Kirkwood, Yates, Campbell, Gardner, Reed, Stewart and Shearer." To the master players should now be added the name of Alfred Jordan, and perhaps one or two others. I was informed by Mr. J.H. Limbrey, the secretary of the English Draughts association, that the late R. Jordan and A. Jordan were not related. The above lists refer only to the Anglo-American game. The Spaniards could make others, with several names much farther back than Payne. I was rather surprised to find that there was no evidence of "blindfold" checkers being known before about 1870. In 1866 Drummond wrote:

Chess, as a showy game, may claim the sway,  
But Draughts for depth will bear the palm away;  
Chess can be played by Philidors though blind,  
But Draughts requires both sight and thoughtful mind.

But very soon after these lines appeared the last one was corrected. Mr. E. Lord, of Birmingham, is credited with being the first to play the game without sight of the board in 1868. Four years later Mr. F. Dunne astonished the Leeds players by introducing blindfold draughts -only one game at a time, it seems- and one of the surprised ones present, W. Strickland, afterwards took up the study of this kind of play and succeeded in playing 20 such games simultaneously. His name should be added to the above list. Since his time Campbell, Shearer, Stewart and Gartner, British, and James Reed and Pillsbury, Americans,



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

have played a greater number of games simultaneously. Pillsbury broke all records with thirty or more, but Gardner has played 28, winning 10 and drawing 6. Perhaps he has bettered this since 1905 my latest date in the matter. H.N. Pillsbury, who died a few years since, was the most remarkable exponent of blindfold" chess and checkers combined: one game at some boards and the other at the others, 20 or more in all, the majority being won by him. He was the American chess champion, and one of the strongest half dozen of American checker players. No other eminent chess player has ever played checkers so well, and no other celebrated checker player has ever played chess so well. Many chess players can play checkers somehow, but few play the game scientifically. Blackburne played a good game of draughts in early life, and W. Gardner is said to be a good chess player. Lasker can play checkers.



**Emanuel Lasker (Wikipedia)**

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

But I think I can say that, except Pillsbury, no individual has ever become a master-player of both games. That is, as to Anglo-American checkers. Deschapelles, the French chess champion of a century ago, was also a "master" at Polish draughts. The reason is rather obvious. Both games require so much study and time that very few persons care to attempt to become expert in both, and of those who do try to do so few have sufficient genius to become first-rate in either. There are many more checker players in the world than there are chess players, and this, I think, applies to all countries except China and Japan, where, however, they have a popular game, besides their own forms of chess, which is more of the nature of checkers than of chess. This game is "I-go" in Japan and "Weichi" in China. The greater popularity of checkers, compared with chess among the mass of the people of Europe and America is due chiefly to the fact that it is more easily learned -up to a certain point at least- and so is taught to and learned by children and young persons to a much greater extent than chess is. A secondary cause is the greater cost of sets of chessmen. As to the, if any, superiority of one game over the other, scientifically, I have never been able to decide. I know that I could never see so deeply into checkers as into chess. I have no doubt about the old game from which checkers sprung being inferior to chess, but modern checkers, as it should be played and is by some, is a great advance on that game. I should have included the following with matter of the time of Sturges. It gives some more names of strange players of long ago, and it raises doubt as to whether Sturges was the strongest English player of his time or even equal to another: Cohen. But the match described was six years earlier than the appearance of Sturges' book. This account is an extract, per my scrap-book, from Pohlman's checker book of 1823 (American, I think). The match was in England, and, I presume, London. It is the oldest record of a regular match that I know of.

On Monday, June 2, 1794, a match at draughts was played at the stone house, on Old street, between the noted Jew Israel Cohen,

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

and the famous Mr. Beaumont. They played 20 games, for one guinea a game, 19 of which were drawn, and the 20th was won by Cohen, who is universally acknowledged to be the best draughts player in the kingdom; £100 to £10 was betted in Cohen's favour, and in the course of play, gold to silver was repeatedly offered. Among the first-rate players present were Mr. Latham, Mr. Martin, Mr. George Cross, the St. James' butcher; Mr. Hughes, and a number of genteel amateurs." With this I conclude what I had to say about individual players. My next, and last, chapter will give some account of the principal team matches, all very modern as to matches of importance, but an old record of the first team match now known of may be of interest.

### NOTES

- (a) In my scrap-book I find mention of two more early checker columns; Home Thoughts, the first magazine with a checker department, 1853; and the New York Clipper, 1856. I also find mention of Wyllie's Examples, a now rare book which evidently contains games played by Wyllie, and perhaps some problems or end games. But I don't think he published it himself. I also find that the "Laird and Lady" opening was formerly known as the "Mixed". For a time it had two names, and it is doubtful which was the oldest. "The Laird and Lady" was known as such more than a century ago -in Scotland- and was named in honour of a gentleman and his wife of the name Cather, of Cambusnethan, then elderly, and lifelong draughts players.
- (b) I recently mentioned a draughts book by Pohlman, and thought it might be an early American work. The book is not in my list of British draughts books, and the name does not look English. But I find that a Mr. J.G. Pohlman published a chess book in London in 1819, so probably he also published the draughts book I gave an extract from [yes]. It is very scarce.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)



**The chessbook of J.G. Pohlman, 1819**

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

**14 April 1912**

I have no doubt but that small team matches were occasionally played between representatives of towns and villages in Scotland and England during the eighteenth century. But the oldest record of a team match that I have found is this, from the Norwich Mercury, of January 15, 1803. It may have been the first county match at our time. There were no county chess matches till later, but cricket matches were common in the South of England, and in other outdoor games in Scotland and the north. Competition between towns or districts at outdoor sports is much older than any at indoor. "On Wednesday a match was played at drafts (draughts) at the King's Head, Yarmouth, between Suffolk and Norfolk; after deep manoeuvring and scientific knowledge, victory declared in favour of Suffolk. Considerable bets were depending and odds were in favour of Suffolk. It is expected that many, and perhaps weekly, trials will take place between these amateurs in this pleasing and skilful amusement. State of games: Suffolk 6, Norfolk 1; ditto drawn games, 3." I wonder how long the "weekly" idea continued. There must have been a burst of enthusiasm in 1803. But Lowestoft, in Suffolk, is not far from Yarmouth in Norfolk, and I have heard that the best checker players are, and long have been, of Lowestoft, of those of Suffolk and Norfolk. There may have been a connection with Scotland through the herring fishery. During the nineteenth century, especially after railway travelling became general and cheap, draughts clubs were formed in great numbers in Britain and the United States, and to some extent in all English-speaking lands. Matches became more frequent, and toward the end of the century match players travelled greater distances than ever before. "Leagues" were formed, and county associations, and these are still growing. Some years ago a match was played in London with 100 players a side, and other such matches, or with nearly that number, have been played in England, Scotland and Australia. The most important team matches have been those between Scotland and England, and one between Great Britain and the United States.

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

Except for one match at Polish draughts in France, I have never read of any team matches at draughts in any non-English-speaking country, but there may have been many. The results of the Scotland vs. England matches were as follows:

Year	Place	Players	Won	Won	Drawn
1884	Glasgow	11	36	7	147
1894	London	12	29	15	130
1899	Glasgow	14	42	25	116
1903	Newcastle	12	15	22	76
1910	Glasgow	11	39	13	79

England won one match by a little and lost all the others by a lot. Seeing the much greater population that England has to draw upon, this is remarkable testimony to Scottish skill at draughts. As also is the score of the British-American match. This, the first match between any two nations separated by the sea, was played at Boston, U.S.A., in March, 1905. There were 10 players a side, almost the strongest possible 20 players in the world in that year. The British team would have been a little stronger by the inclusion of H. Henderson, a Scot, who had lately been second in the Scottish championship tourney, but he was excluded in order to allow the English players to number five, half the team. The results were: Great Britain, 73 wins; United States, 34 wins; drawn games, 283. The Scots won 46 and lost only 2. The five Englishmen won 27 and lost 32. Two of them won more than they lost, one as much, and the other two lost 10 more than they won. The scores of all players who won more than they lost were: America: Heffner, 4 to 1; Baker, 5 to 3; Scotch: R. Jordan, 13 to 0; Buchanan, 8 to 0; Ferrie, 9 to 1; Stewart, 7 to 0; Searight, 9 to 1; English: A. Jordan, 6 to 3; W. Gardner, 5 to 3. In this match, which lasted for 10 days, on one of which the Americans won 6 games to 5, each player had to play four games with each of the other side. As a Pittsburg paper said at the time: "The Scots did it. We have the English half of the visiting team."

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

I have now completed, but for a few notes below, this history of checkers, the first to appear in print in any language. There are gaps and imperfections, which some future writer may fill up or improve upon. Of previous attempts at a sketch of the history of the game the best is the historical introduction to “Kear’s Sturges”. I have suggested that some American authority should be asked by Editor Kerr to contribute to the Pittsburg Leader a sketch of the history of the game particularly in America. A game which, in many lands:

“Still from age to age,  
Can charme the callow mind of youth,  
and yet perplex the sage.  
Complex, yet simple; open, close;  
tis near and also far,  
Elusive as a will-0’-the-wisp  
and steadfast as a star.”

### NOTES

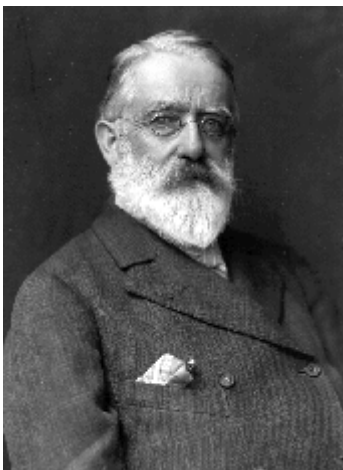
I have said nothing of the “Losing Game“. Little need be said. It has long been known, but is seldom played. It is an amusing variety of checkers which can be played in two ways. You win by forcing your opponent to take all your pieces or otherwise preventing you from making a move in turn. Or you can play the game with 12 men against one, and win by forcing that one man to take all of your men. Place the black men as usual, and one white man on 28 or 29 or 32. I think it likely that this game is nearly as old as the ordinary. I do not know who first discovered the importance of the "calculation of the move", sometimes called the "vantage or opposition". It is not always to one’s advantage to have “the move” -though it generally is- but it is often important to know which player has it. Sturges knew all about it, and described the method of discovery. Some one, long ago wrote:

When it is your turn to play,

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

Systems one to four survey;  
If the total ODD should prove,  
Then you'll find you have to move,  
But if EVEN, then it's clear  
You will have a "block" to fear.

My attention has been called, as to the supposed origin of checkers, to a book by the late Professor W. Fiske, an American, who studies the early and other records of chess, merrels, fox and geese", backgammon, and to some extent, checkers. This book is entitled "Chess in Iceland", but it deals chiefly with the other games mentioned, and outside of Iceland.



**Professor Daniel William Fiske**

Professor Fiske knew nothing of the rules of "alquerque with 12", or how the men were placed in play, or how they moved or captured, until shortly before his death and after he had practically completed his book. Then he was supplied with a copy of the Alfonso MS" containing the alquerque portion, which he had not seen before. He did not alter what he had written about checkers, and I doubt if he realized the importance of the fresh information as to its bearing on the origin of the



## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

present form of draughts. This is what he finally wrote of our game:

Draughts is a greatly simplified chess, and is hence to be considered as having its direct and sole origin in that game. It was apparently devised in Spain during or before the thirteenth century. It reached England in the fourteenth century.”

These periods are correct, but, as readers of this history can see, I disagree entirely as to the sole origin of checkers in chess, or as to checkers being a simplified chess -formed merely from the moves of the antique chess queens combined with the jumping power of the antique bishops, as he thought, and had written of earlier- in entire ignorance of the moves and captures and compulsory "take" of "alquerque with 12 men a side". The ancient chess bishops could leap over a piece of his own colour as well as the other, and he never could capture a piece by jumping over it. There is no real similarity between the old chess bishops and a king in checkers. Nor could the chess queens ever make captures by jumping over pieces. Had our game been invented by merely playing with 12 chess queens on each side their mode of making captures would have remained as in chess. But it is the alquerque mode, and the take is compulsory, which is opposed to chess ideas. Furthermore, we find the huff for not taking" in alquerque as in checkers.

Our game was influenced by chess to the extent of a new rule (somewhere about 1300) preventing the men or pawns from moving backward until they had reached the other side of the board and been promoted to queens, or, as we say, kings. Hence the name "Dama" for the game. The use of the chessboard also altered the game, and improved it by causing a difference of play through the "single corner" provided by playing on diagonal lines only. But this game which was so changed in the thirteenth century had existed for several or many centuries before under the name of "alquerque" or "al-kirk". Knowledge of this was lost from perhaps the fifteenth century until within the last few years. The alquerque game continued to be played in

## The History of Checkers (Draughts)

its old form, and is still known in some parts of the world. But it is quite a modern discovery that this ancient form of draughts was directly connected with the origin of checkers. Of the ancient forms of draughts, or games of a draughts-like nature, alquerque with 12" is the nearest to our game. I consider it to be our game in a simpler form, very much as chess of the first century, or so was the present chess in a simpler form.



**The draughts game played with the aid of lines**  
(Courtesy of: [http://ian.macky.net/secretmuseum/page\\_2.8.html](http://ian.macky.net/secretmuseum/page_2.8.html))

The sheet anchor of my belief is the alquerque portion of the Alfonso MS, together with the fact that draughts or checkers as now known, and as known in the fourteenth century, is not mentioned in that Spanish compendium of games of 1283. Since the age in which it was written very few persons have read the alquerque portion, most of the copies of or extracts from the MS only give the chess portion, and this for the sake of the ancient problems. And those who have looked in the alquerque portion have nearly all or quite all been chess players, or students of chess history, who, till lately, did not think of a game on one

## **The History of Checkers (Draughts)**

kind of board being the mother of checkers, played on another. But it is the moves and captures that make the game, not the board, as is shown at once in the Lallement board and the Philippine board. This independence for checkers of the use of a chessboard does not seem to have been noticed by any previous writer on the question of the origin of our game.

J.G. White, of Cleveland, O., reminds me that the Orientals and North Africans who play any form of checkers, name the game "damas", or some word beginning with "dam", and that as each name evidently came from Spanish or western Europe it is unlikely that any of these invented the game or transferred it to the chess board, as in that case they would not have borrowed the Spanish name but have retained their own. I agree that this is probable, and that, therefore, we may consider that our game grew from the alquerque among the Spaniards, about 1290. I did not say that it did so among the Moors, but that it may have done. In conclusion I quote a verse from an American checker poet, Ernest Williams - I change one word:

Then here's to the Land of the Thistle  
and grand old British flag;  
And here's to that brilliant emblem of  
which you Yankees brag -  
May they long float together in their  
Right predestined place,  
For the health of civilization and the  
Wealth of the human race.

**W.S. Branch**

(THE END)

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